

Title: Harry Potter and the Wand of Uru

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Rating: R/FR18

Disclaimer: Captain Fangirlhumper... err, J.K. Rowling owns the Harry Potter universe. Wish they were mine so I could do utterly retarded things to them and watch my bank account get steadily larger, but sadly not mine.

Summary: Wishing upon a falling star, 17 year-old Harry ends up in the body of his 10 year-old self, in a world where nothing is quite the same. How will he handle being a 'normal' boy in an unknown world?

Joe's Note: This originally started with the intention of being yet another rewrite of SilverAegis's infamous, oft-abandoned Harry Potter and the New Life. But then after a few people bitching about me starting after his self-imposed cut off date for adoptions and taking a look at the story... I realized that with a few more changes, it wouldn't really be his story at all anymore. Just another remake of the books. After all, look at all the crap I had to remove from the original:

1.) I'd cut out all the bad Ranma crap, like facefaulting, the 'demon head attack', Amy's incessant nattering about grandchildren, etc.

2.) Likewise, the creepy fixation the Blacks and Potters have with getting their PREPUBESCENT children together disappeared more thoroughly than Dubya's dignity.

3.) Since the original author never actually EXPLORED the 'shadow mage' concept other than to leave it this giant deus ex that would have been fully written out in the prequel to this story, I've removed it. Harry is still ridiculously powerful and tied to an element, but just not shadow.

4.) Yeah, pretty much everything Japanese was removed. Not just the anime-insertion bits mentioned above, but the random bits of bowing, suffixes on names, spontaneous kimonos, etc. One of the characters will be a native of Hong Kong, but even then she's equally fluent in the English language and culture and won't be trying to turn Hogwarts into Chinatown or anything.

So... yeah. After all that was gone, what was left was pretty much any time travel fic. A little more work never killed anyone, and got the SilverAegis curse off the fic... so why not?

The sharp little claps of high heels sounded against the polished wood floors of the heads' common room, but he didn't look up from what he was working on. The visitor stopped in front of him and he

could practically picture her, bushy brown hair more frazzled than usual, the two spots of color high on her cheeks, arms crossed over her chest as she glared at him. Hermione Granger was a creature of habit, after all. "Harry James Potter!"

"That was my name last time I checked, yes." Harry opted not to look up, muggle pen scratching softly against the page of his enchanted journal as he wrote. It was useless to react, he'd come to realize long ago; their discussions never changed and yet she never got tired of trying to fight them one more time with him. "Can I help you with something, Hermione?"

Grabbing the top of his journal, Hermione tipped it down so she could actually meet his eyes. "Yes. You're going to go get dressed and then we're an appearance at a party in the Gryffindor common room. And you're going to have fun at that party even if I have to slip a few potions in your butterbeer. Now get moving."

Harry snorted and batted her hand away before raising his journal again. "I don't think so, but you have fun with that. Assuming you stay more than five minutes before dragging Ron off somewhere private."

He swore he could actually feel the glare that one earned him before she stomped back toward her room.

As if he was actually going to let himself get dragged to some foolish party. Quidditch season was over for the year, so it was probably someone's birthday or maybe even just a party for the sake of a party. The Gryffindors did seem to enjoy doing that these days and... well, the professors lacked the will to reign in the student body as a whole, seeing as how they'd witnessed death up close when Voldemort marched on Hogwarts in February of that year.

While he'd lost others over the years... Cedric, Sirius, and a few members of the Order in small battles here and there... that one fight had done almost as much damage to his life and happiness as his second Halloween. Many people had died in the final battle, including his last surviving link to his parents: Remus Lupin. However, Remus wasn't the worst of it. Ginny had died that day as well, mere hours

after he'd proposed to her and she'd accepted. Voldemort sure was a sick fuck, Harry mused. Attacking on Valentine's Day.

Not that it was known as Valentine's Day anymore. Oh no. From now until the wizarding world got bored with him, February 14th would be Harry Potter Day.

That was the other reason, apart from the loss of people close to him, behind his withdrawal from the world around him. His popularity pushed in on him from all sides now, everyone wanting something from the famous Boy-Who-Defeated-Voldemort. Friendship, courtship... more than a few witches in his age group (and a few whose age ranged out as far as his mother's class at Hogwarts) had even made outright sexual advances, wanting nothing more than to be able to brag about being a notch on their savior's bedpost. It was all quite disturbing in his opinion.

Ron hadn't taken it too well, either. While their friendship had been on rocky ground since the redhead and Hermione had started dating, it had deteriorated and collapsed completely in the aftermath of Voldemort's demise. Ron had decided he was no longer content to be Harry Potter's sidekick, and even though he was recognized for his role in the war, he'd wanted a share of Harry's fame too... fame he had not one iota of claim to. And it'd eaten at him, until the day he finally gave in and walked away from Harry.

Even Hermione was different in this strange new world of his. She'd gone from a slightly bossy yet caring pseudo-sister to a hideously obnoxious harpy, obsessed with the idea of returning him to 'normal'. What was normal for him? He'd been a beaten, starved, and overworked house slave since he could walk, at eleven he'd learned he was a wizard and part of a secret society (and a celebrity in that society at that) and then the last seven years had been spent fighting Voldemort in one form or another. Where was normal in any of that?

And besides, what did Hermione know about normal? She was the outcast bookworm... who he was pretty sure she had some degree of nymphomania, given the frequency and duration of Ron's visits to the Head Girl's room. Head Girl duties, pleasure reading, and even her precious homework had started to fall by the wayside as of late and

Harry knew that if they weren't only three weeks from NEWTs and graduation, Dumbledore and McGonagall would be stepping in to address the matter.

Harry snorted; hopefully prophylactics were on the NEWTs, because that was about the only thing related to charms or potions Hermione had worked on outside the classroom since... pretty much February.

He knew that at least for him, though, NEWTs would be no problem. He'd been trained by the best of the best to defeat Voldemort, and his knowledge in every one of his classes was post-NEWT at a minimum. These days, his DADA, charms, and transfiguration knowledge was starting to reach out into the realm of 'only half a dozen people alive know some of the spells' territory. No, he dared say passing his NEWTs would be no problem at all. Which was good, because that gave him time for extracurricular things like being Head Boy and Quidditch Captain, which in turn took his mind off his life.

After a few refreshingly quiet minutes, Hermione came back out of the Head Girl's room and slammed the door behind her, making Harry look up from what he was doing. Her attire garnered a raised eyebrow from him; he wasn't aware Hermione knew skirts that short existed, much less owned one. He stared pointedly at her bare thigh for a moment before sliding his gaze up to meet her eyes and she flushed slightly. "Ron likes it when I dress like this. Now go get dressed. We're leaving in three minutes."

"No. Non. Nyet. Nein. Næi. It was nice NOing you. Have I made myself perfectly clear yet, or would you like me to start branching out into some of the really odd languages I learned while training?" Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and started tapping her foot, causing Harry to roll his eyes. "You're not going to win this, Hermione. I'm not going to the party. Unlike you, I actually take care of my head duties. And I'm not talking about what Ron asks you to do in every dark corner of the school he can manage to drag you into."

Hermione blushed even darker at the reminder of Harry's seemingly uncanny ability to walk in on her and Ron in compromising positions around the school. Not that he had any desire to, mind you, but when they took to using the entire school as their personal sexual

playground... well, he couldn't very well avoid EVERYWHERE out of fear he'd walk in on them. He'd used the Marauder's Map near the beginning of the year to aid in his patrolling, but that'd taken all the fun out of it after a while. Now, walking in on his former best friends was the price he had to pay for the rest of each evening's entertainment.

It was generally worth it.

Well, except for that time with Ron, a drunk Hermione, and an equally inebriated Pansy Parkinson. It was going to him take years of therapy or quite possibly some fun spell time with Gilderoy Lockhart for him to ever get over walking in on THAT one.

"Harry." Oh Merlin, the harpy was whining at him again. Did she ever shut up? "I'm worried about you. You've been so different since you defeated Voldemort. You don't talk to anyone, you don't do anything fun..." Hermione sat on the arm of his chair, putting her hand over his. "This isn't what she would have wanted for you, Harry."

White hot fury burned through Harry's veins, so violent that he momentarily feared that Voldemort was back and emotions were leaking through his scar again. Then he realized that his occlumency barriers were still at full strength and it was his own rage at Hermione. "Ginny has been dead for three months, Hermione. THREE MONTHS. I loved her. We had just gotten engaged that very day, and Voldemort tore her apart in front of me for his own sick amusement. And then... then I tore him from the fabric of reality in revenge. He didn't die or anything; I made him cease to exist. And yet when I was done with that... Ginny was still gone. So no, Hermione, don't try and tell me what Ginny would have wanted. Because what she would have wanted for me doesn't matter. She's dead. And despite all the power I have at my fingertips... I can't change that. I can't bring her back."

"Harry..."

Harry shook his head, looking down at his journal for a moment before realizing he wouldn't be getting any more work done tonight and closing it. It wasn't just any journal; the pages were filled with

potions recipes, spell variations he'd personally created, and other things he felt that the outside world didn't need to know about magic. Each page had a snake printed across the top in deep green ink, enabling him to switch to parselscript when he made entries. Anyone other than him would just see squiggles on a page, assuming they even got the journal open without being killed by his rather... fierce... protections. "Just... stop trying, Hermione. I'm going to go start rounds. Try to keep to either Ron's room or the Head Girl's room tonight. I'm getting tired of having to explain certain entries on the point deduction log to Professor McGonagall." Without waiting for a response, he shrunk his journal and stuffed it into a pocket before making his way out the portrait hole and into the hall.

After his rounds were done, taking longer than they would have if Hermione was still pulling her weight, Harry made his way out on the grounds, crossing the lawn to sit atop a hill that looked down on Hogsmeade. He was allowed to leave the castle whenever he wanted to because... well, he wanted to. It wasn't like anyone could stop him. Not many would try, either, not after he'd killed the entire Inner Circle before tearing Voldemort from the fabric of reality and sending him into the great beyond with a spell that even Albus Dumbledore had publicly admitted he did not know. Snape and both male Malfoys had died before the final battle, though. Harry smirked. He'd seen to that personally.

Suddenly remembering what day of the week it was, Harry drew his secondary wand and rolled it between his fingers. The same length as his original holly and phoenix feather wand, this one had been gifted unto him by Dumbledore himself, who had in turn received it from his mentor, who had in turn received it from his mentor, and so on. None had been able to make the wand of oak and dwarf heart tissue so much as shoot a spark, the strange metal that wrapped the shaft in almost organic tendrils growing uncomfortably hot to the touch whenever they tried. But Harry could not only use the wand... he had unlocked its other secrets.

Focusing, Harry watched as the wand grew, getting almost twice as long and thickening to form a proper handle. At the same time, the metal flowed up to the tip and formed into the fat head of a warhammer. Harry hopped to his feet, thrusting the hammer up into

the sky, and then his body disappeared from the grounds as lightning did the impossible and surged upward from the ground into the night sky.

At almost the same time, five hundred miles away in the town of Godric's Hollow, a single bolt of lightning shot down out of the cloudless night sky. It hit a spot just outside the long burnt and abandoned remains of the Potter home, scorching one of the stones of the walkway and leaving a teenage boy in its wake. It was time, just as Harry did every week since her death, for him to visit Ginny's grave.

Breaking ranks with every Weasley in the last five hundred years, Ginevra Molly Weasley had been buried in the Potter Family Cemetery, along with fellow outsider Remus Lupin and an empty casket representing Sirius Black's remainsless death. Her parents hadn't protested the action, thankfully; Harry and Ginny had been engaged (albeit for hours) and the family felt honored that Harry felt so strongly about their daughter that he wanted her buried alongside his parents.

Now, standing there in front of her grave, Harry brought the hammer down and let loose a blast of pinkish-red lightning from the head. Rather than being a herald of destruction, though, the lightning crawled over the ground and left dozens of perfect, blood red roses in its wake. Returning his secret weapon to its wand form and tucking it away, Harry sank to his knees and stared at the headstone that marked the grave of his beloved.

"I hope Dumbledore is right and death is the next great adventure, because I'd hate to think you're as bored as I have been lately." Harry chuckled, tracing his fingers over the letters carved into the granite. "Haven't talked to your brother in weeks, unless you count him arguing about it when I take points from him for public indecency. The harpy came after me again tonight... wanted me to go to some party. I would have Bat-Bogeyed her, but it'd remind me too much of you. Neville's already getting work offers from a few famous greenhouses, which is helping take the stress off NEWTs for him."

Harry paused for a moment before deciding to share the next bit, lips curling up at the thought of a certain blonde who'd managed to secure an increasingly important spot in his life. Actually, with Ron, Hermione, and Ginny gone... next to Neville, Luna was his only other real friend. There was only one way she could get more important to him and although he wasn't willing to take that step, it didn't stop her from trying. "Luna's still crushing on me and shows up in the oddest places. But she's a real friend and I don't have many of those anymore so I guess I'd rather have her being herself than suffer the fan girls. She doesn't try to make me talk like Hermione, and it's really nice to be able to talk as much or as little as I want to without being psychoanalyzed for it. And there's something actually flattering about her being interested in me, unlike the fan girls. Although I wish you and Luna hadn't tagged along with Hermione for that lingerie shopping expedition at the start of her slag phase. Do you know how hard it is to resist a pretty girl in frilly knickers and nothing else waiting for you in your bed?"

Pausing, Harry thought about what he'd just said. "Wait, she probably got the idea from you. After all, that's how you finally got me to loosen up and shag you. Huh. I am really ashamed for not figuring that one out sooner."

Sprawling out beside Ginny's grave, Harry rolled onto his back and stared up at the stars. "I just wish you were here. My parents died... Sirius died... Remus died... you died... if I get too close to Luna, she'll probably die too. What's the point of having all this power if I can use it to save strangers but not the people I love? I know it's not supposed to be... but life isn't fair. And I hate it."

Silence fell as he continued to stare, plenty of thoughts in his head but no way to verbalize them easily. He noticed a few shooting stars burning past overhead and, as stupid as he knew it was, wished he wasn't so alone anymore. Looking around, he waited for a moment for Merlin or someone to pop up with a resurrected Ginny or parents who loved him or something... but it was not to be. Snorting and feeling immensely stupid, Harry closed his eyes and relaxed. He technically couldn't stay off-grounds overnight... but who was going to say anything? He was Harry Potter.

As drifted off, Harry thought he felt an odd falling sensation... but that was just ridiculous, because he was already lying on the ground.

Right?

When Harry woke up the next morning, he was exhausted. And not 'had a tough time sleeping' exhausted or 'Voldemort was sending me dreams of torturing muggles' exhausted. It was a bone deep weariness that had him utterly confused; he hadn't done anything worthy of that kind of achiness at all lately, much less in the last day or so. Then he looked around and noticed something was different.

Belay that... everything was different.

The grave he'd been lying on was gone, as were the flowers he'd laid around it for Ginny. Looking around wildly, Harry realized that not only was her grave gone, so was Remus's. And both his parents'. "If this is some kind of sick joke, I'm going to kill the person responsible in a way so painful, Voldemort would have watched on in awe!" That made him aware of another change: his voice sounded far, far younger and higher-pitched than it should at his age. Slowly, he looked down at his body and realized his voice wasn't the only thing younger than it should have been. "What the bloody hell?"

After taking a few minutes to calm down and examine his body, Harry had come to the conclusion that... he had no idea what the hell was going on. For some bizarre reason, he was roughly ten again. He was still wearing his school uniform and black robe, although they were both understandably a bit too big for him in his current state. With a flick of his wrist, his regular wand jumped to his hand and he waved it over his body, shrinking them to fit properly. Even more interesting, his magic was still at it's seventeen year-old levels even though he was young again, making him wonder if he was just at his full growth now or if he'd now grow even stronger than he had before.

Debating what to do next, he decided assessing his surroundings was a good idea and made a beeline for the more populated areas of Godric's Hollow. It was a bit more active than any other time he'd been there, but then again he hadn't visited it during the day except for a few times during the war while he was searching for horcruxes.

The people all greeted him politely, which wasn't odd, but the fact that they didn't bug him for autographs or ask why their hero was ten years old again was.

Curiouser and curiouser.

A strange urge drew him back up the street, heading for where the remains of his parents' home would be. It was set back from view behind a row of trees, a narrow path providing access, but just as Harry stepped onto the path a person tackled him, sending both of them to the ground. While his powers were harder to use without his secondary wand in his hand in either its wand or warhammer form, he could still do so and he was preparing to send a lethal jolt of electricity through his attacker when he remembered something. He'd killed all the Death Eaters. This had to be an overenthusiastic fan, because nobody would be stupid enough to attack him, especially in broad daylight and in so simple a fashion. He looked up at the person on top of him and froze.

Ginny?

No, her eyes were the wrong color. A bit more of a hazel than the chocolate brown Ginny possessed. But if Harry was his father's son with his mother's eyes, this girl was definitely a prepubescent Lily Potter, albeit with the wrong colored eyes. What the hell kind of trick was this? Then she opened her mouth and really floored him. "Harry! Where were you? Mummy and Daddy have been searching all over for you! Do you know how worried we've been?" Tears welled up at the corners of her eyes.

Harry was shocked. What the hell was this girl talking about? Seeing that she was about to cry, he immediately reached out and pulled her in for a hug. He didn't know why he was hugging the random lunatic who thought she was related to him (and it wouldn't be the first time he'd had a 'long lost relative' pop up now that he had defeated Voldemort and there was no longer a lunatic gunning for those closest to him), but it felt like the right thing to do. Especially since he was pants at dealing with crying girls. When he let go and she pulled back, he found himself the recipient of a look he couldn't decipher. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Harry, but where have you been? You've been missing since yesterday!" The girl bounced on him before hopping off and yanking him to his feet. "Mummy and Daddy have been really worried, and they've even had Uncle Sirius and Uncle Remus helping search the woods. Daddy and Uncle Sirius had to take the day off from work..." Harry's brain froze, and he tuned out the rest of her almost Hermione-esque rant.

Uncle Sirius?

Uncle Remus?

This was just getting weirder and weirder.

"Don't worry, I'm fine. See? Why don't we go back to our parents?" Harry didn't know what was going on, but maybe she'd lead him back to her real parents and he could make sure she got help. Instead, she grabbed his hand and pulled him down the path toward his familial home.

While the similarities in appearance between her and his dead mother were disturbing, something else was bothering Harry. Even if she was mentally ill, that didn't explain how she knew about Sirius and Remus. While Sirius's connection to the Potters and Harry in particular had mentioned a few times in interviews, the fact that Remus was anything more than a former professor had never made it into publication as far as he knew. Well, everyone in his parents' generation had known that James Potter, Sirius Black, and Remus were thick as thieves, but how did this little slip of a girl know?

"Hey Harry!" He looked over at her, letting out a vaguely affirmative noise. "Where'd you get the cool outfit? You look like the pictures of Mummy and Daddy from back when they were in Hogwarts."

Crap. Harry didn't know how to respond to that one. Or how to explain it when he got 'home', assuming there were adults there to continue this charade. Too bad he hadn't thought to transfigure his outfit before wandering out of the graveyard. And he couldn't whip out his wand and do magic in front of this girl, especially since he was

looking roughly ten these days and it would raise far too many questions. He comforted himself with the fact that at least they weren't the basilisk hide battle robes he'd worn in the days leading up to his final confrontation with Voldemort. Those would have been far, far worse to try and explain. "Uhh..." Thankfully, something came along to save him in the nick of time.

"HARRY!" He looked over just in time for another body to slam into him, this one bigger and pulling him in for a hug instead of bowling him over like his 'sister' had. As she cried on his shoulder, he pushed up on his toes to see past her and watched two others surge out of a house that shouldn't have been standing on his property: a twin of the redhead who had pounced on him earlier, and a face Harry knew he definitely shouldn't have been seeing, causing him to shove the new woman away in shock. No...

"Harry?" His long-dead mother, albeit a version older than any he'd seen in pictures, was standing in front of him. Behind her was a man who bore a suspicious resemblance to his father, and they had twin redheaded girls who referred to Sirius and Remus as uncles. What in God's name was going on here?

There was a crack behind him and the shocks kept coming as Harry whirled around to face the newcomer. "Hey! You found the squirt!" A very much alive, young, and healthy Sirius reached forward to ruffle his hair. "Does that mean we can stop searching?" Harry looked back at the two adults who resembled his parents, who nodded their assent. "I'll go tell Amy and we can bring Cassie over for lunch." And before Harry could return his attention to Sirius, his godfather disappeared with another crack.

That left Harry with two strange people who looked like his parents and the twins who were supposedly his little sisters if all this was true. And if it was true, this was definitely the weirdest thing he'd ever experienced since coming to the wizarding world... and he'd experienced some pretty weird things. After a long moment of silence, his 'father' exploded. "Harry! We've been looking all over for you! You didn't come home at all yesterday, disappeared overnight... do you know how worried we've been?"

Even though he wasn't sure what was going on... if this somehow was his family, miraculously back from the dead or some such, Harry didn't want to be off on the wrong foot within the first five minutes of knowing them. He'd always wanted a chance to meet his parents and now he'd been given it. Well, they were a version of his parents, at any rate, if not the actual two people responsible for his birth. Close enough, though, and he wasn't going to mess it up. So, ducking his head, he shuffled back and forth a bit. "I'm sorry, Dad." Silence fell and Harry looked up, finding everyone staring at him oddly. "What?"

Almost in unison, all four of them spoke up. "You never apologize."

Harry didn't know what to do with that one; was he a little shit like Draco Malfoy in this bizarre world? Merlin, he hoped not. Especially if he was so bad he tormented his own family. A long moment of thought didn't provide a way to respond to that, so he just shrugged and his father sighed. "Anyways, let's get back inside. And son, next time you want to camp out or something, tell me, okay? We can go together. I've got a wizarding tent in the attic and everything."

Camping with his father. Such a thing had previously been confined to his wildest dreams. Harry nodded and gave the man a small smile. "Okay... Dad." It didn't feel as awkward that time. Maybe he was starting to accept that the whole thing might be real, and these people might be his parents and siblings?

He must have been known for being flighty because almost as soon as they entered the house (one a good deal larger than the home his parents had lived in, which was understandable given they had three children instead of just one infant, he supposed), his father gave his mother a peck on the cheek and then he and the twins wandered off to do other things. That left him alone with his mum. "Harry, dear, what's wrong? You look... I don't know, out of it?" Reaching forward, she put her hand on his forehead to check his temperature. "Well at least you're not getting sick. That time you brought home dragon pox and infected Rose and Jasmine was a nightmare."

"Err..." How did one explain that they were seeing their mother, their sixteen years dead mother, for the first time? And that it was hard to handle? Although at least now he had names to go with the girls,

even if he didn't know which was which or how to tell them apart (if there even was a way).

Then his mother noticed the same thing his sister had and gasped, running her hands over his shoulders. "And why on earth are you dressed like a Hogwarts student already? Where did you get these?"

The attic. Based on the size of the house, they probably had an attic. "The attic?"

Right answer, Harry discovered, when his mother sighed before shaking her head fondly. "That'll teach your father and I to be such packrats, I suppose. Well, go change into something that's actually yours while I get lunch ready, okay? Leave them in your hamper with the rest of your dirty clothes and I'll bring them back up to the attic after I do laundry this week."

Harry nodded, dashing up the stairs he had seen upon entering the house and quickly finding his room on the second floor. An in-depth analysis of his surroundings could wait, he decided, using magic to restore his journal before tucking it away between the mattress and box spring and throwing his uniform into the hamper. Maybe it was all a dream and he'd wake up any minute. If that was the case, though, he wanted to spend as much time getting to know these people as possible because they were the closest he'd ever get to being with his parents. Throwing on a t-shirt and slacks, he made his way back downstairs and into the kitchen.

They had a really nice home, he realized, lived in like the Burrow but bigger and obviously more expensive. But nowhere near as grand and cold as Malfoy Manor. It was in a word, perfect. Sitting at the kitchen table, watching his mother bustle around making lunch (had he really slept the morning away?), Harry realized the only reasonable answer to the question of what was going on, assuming of course that this wasn't some sort of dream or hallucination. He had somehow managed to slip diagonally through time, not only moving backwards but to an alternate universe as well. That's why he was younger, surrounded by a family that shouldn't be... at least not in his world.

He was snapped out of his thoughts by the sound of his mother's voice. "Harry, what's wrong? Usually you'd be out back flying your broom, or bugging your father to teach you new pranks you can play on the girls and I. You're awfully quiet, too. Are you sure you're okay?"

Harry nodded, still uncertain enough in this strange new world to be leery of answering. Maybe he could try... "I want first dibs on lunch, so I figure if I hang out with you, I'll get the best bits all for myself." He grinned and rubbed his hands together greedily, which made his mother laugh before turning away to face the counter again.

Waiting until his mother was completely distracted with assembling a giant pile of sandwiches to accompany the soup on the stove, Harry held out his hand and summoned what looked like a photo album to him. It was, thankfully, and he began to flip through the pages, soaking up names and important events. This would help immeasurably as far as surviving in the house. Well, at least there weren't any other siblings in the house. Jasmine and Rose, though, seemed to follow the Weasley twins as far as preferring to look perfectly identical and Harry quickly gave up on trying to tell them apart based on the pictures.

Looking at the dates under the array of pictures showing each of their births, Harry realized something about himself and the twins. In just shy of eleven months, his mother had given birth to him and then gotten pregnant with and delivered his twin sisters. They were Irish triplets. Sweet Merlin, didn't these people know what a contraceptive charm was for?

Joe's Note: Since I might as well whore once in a while... review please!

After another half hour or so, there was a stampede worthy of the Weasley clan as everyone raced in for lunch. Not just his father and sisters, either; the fireplace flared green and Remus appeared, followed by Sirius, a tall blonde who reminded him of Fleur, and a girl who looked to be the same age as the twins. Not knowing how he fit into the family dynamics or how he was supposed to interact with Sirius's daughter, since most boys his age would probably still be in the 'girls have cooties' phase, Harry opted to remain silent, staking out a seat by his mother and just observing the two families interacting.

It was so weird to see Sirius with a wife and daughter. Obviously he'd never had that chance in Harry's original world, being a prisoner of Azkaban and all. It suited him, though. His wife Amy was American, oddly enough, and a full Veela at that. Evidently a number of magical species had fled to the Colonies to escape British oppression two centuries ago and Sirius had met Amy while visiting Hollywood, home to America's biggest Veela colony. The couple reminded him a bit of Ron and Hermione before his former friends had discovered the joys of sex: fighting over the stupidest things before snogging passionately, stopping, and starting the whole cycle all over again.

Harry wasn't quite sure what to make of Cassiopeia, though. He knew through Fleur that a Veela's aura began to emerge during puberty and that it usually caused a bit of social isolation as a girl's friends turned on her due to the overwhelming male attention. But Cassie, as he learned she was called, was definitely too young for that to be a problem. So why was she as quiet as he was, sitting next to Amy and shooting little glances over at him every once in a while?

Remus, sadly, lacked both a significant other and children at present. Evidently this world wasn't any kinder to its werewolves than Harry's original had been. Thinking back, Harry remembered Remus mentioning an interest in one or two of their fellow Order members during firewhiskey-fueled moments of sharing. Maybe he could manipulate things so Remus met them again in this world, except

without the shadow of war and painful death hanging over them to squash the romantic mood.

The werewolf was still a part of the extended Potter-Black-Lupin family, though, cracking jokes with the remaining two Marauders over lunch as they passed the soup pot and sandwich platters around. The twins were busy talking about girl things Harry probably didn't care to know about, while Lily and Amy discussed the latest advancements in the field of charms. Harry and Cassie were the only quiet ones, and evidently that was abnormal behavior on his part because the adults kept looking over at him. Luckily, nobody commented on it, saving him from having to lie again.

It seemed he only could be ignored for so long, though, before someone inevitably acknowledged his presence at the table. A slight nudge in the ribs made him look up at his mother, who appeared a bit upset. "Harry? Where did you wander off to last night? We spent all night and most of this morning looking for you."

That got the attention of the rest of the table and silence descended, leaving Harry the uncomfortable center of attention. "I... uhh... was following a snake I saw."

Even as the twins broke out in whispers, the five adults at the table exchanged looks. His father was the first one to speak up. "A snake, Harry?"

"Yeah, it was this little red snake. Peculiar color; like something from a zoo. Thought maybe someone's pet escaped and if I caught it, we could bring it back. I was following it and then I got distracted and all turned around and next thing I know, I have no clue where I am. So I waited for night and I could see somebody's house lights but they were really far away. So I used a stick to draw an arrow in the dirt, so I'd know which way to walk to get home, took a nap, and when it was light, I got up I walked back to the town. That's where Jasmine found me." It was a whopper of a lie, but after a moment of staring at him oddly, his father just sighed and went back to talking with Sirius. Wow. Was he really that big a bungler in this world, that people would believe he'd just randomly wander off and get lost for a day? And hey, Jasmine was in purple today while Rose was in pink. He could use

that later to see whose room was whose and, if he got up early, maybe even keep track of them from now on.

His mother was the only one who seemed to find it odd, ignoring Amy's attempt at resuming conversation in favor of staring at him. Harry instinctively brought his occlumency shields up to full strength before relaxing. The mental arts were rare magic; what were the odds that his mother of all people was skilled in legilimency? Molly Weasley maybe, seeing as how she managed to rule six unruly children (and Percy) with an iron fist. His own mother, though? He doubted it.

When lunch ended, Harry wandered the house aimlessly for a bit before returning to his room and looking around in awe. It was huge, especially compared to his room at the Dursleys' house. Hanging on one wall was a Nimbus 2000 and there were quidditch posters and memorabilia everywhere. Strangely enough, there literally wasn't a book in sight, not even something fictional for pleasure reading. Clearly, he was not an intellectual in this world or at least he hadn't been in the past. With everything he knew now, it would be hard to avoid being labeled as a bookworm unless he severely downplayed what he knew and could do... and that wasn't something he was entirely keen on doing.

He could ponder his future at a later date, though. What did he want to do with his afternoon? Harry still knew almost nothing about this self and the world he lived in... so he decided to adopt Hermione's outlook on life. When in doubt, go to the library. The house had a fairly large library, it turned out, and he quickly found a book on modern history, settling down in an armchair to do some light reading.

What he learned shocked him. This Harry's parents had escaped Voldemort three times on the battlefield, but the house had never been attacked at the end of the first war. Voldemort had attacked the Longbottoms first, turning Neville into the Boy-Who-Lived. His parents hadn't been home during the attack, although an Auror trainee earning extra money from nanny work had been at their manor with Neville and lost her life trying to fend off the Dark Lord. Just like Harry in his native world, this Neville now possessed a lightning bolt scar that marked him as Voldemort's supposed equal.

That raised two interesting questions, and Harry made sure he was alone before wandlessly conjuring up a mirror. Well, his scar was gone. Interesting. And if that was true, then... another wave of his hand created a small, silvery-red viper. § Hello? §

After turning back and forth to assess its surroundings, tongue flicking out of its mouth to taste the air, the viper raised its head to stare at Harry. § What is it that you desire, Master? §

Even more interesting. He had no link to Voldemort anymore, but still had the most notable power he'd inherited from the Heir of Slytherin. Well, at least that meant he could still read his parselscript journal. Losing that would have been a royal pain in the arse. With a quick vanishing charm, the viper was gone and Harry went back to reading about the recent past. Or at least recent in so far as this world was concerned; losing close to a decade was playing havoc with his sense of relative time.

Moving on to just after Voldemort's fall, Harry discovered that Igor Karkaroff had again betrayed his comrades and provided the Ministry with a list of names. Lucius had again bought his way out of trouble, the Lestrangle trio was again in Azkaban... and Peter Pettigrew had not only named, but the little bastard was captured and imprisoned? That was new. He was currently serving three consecutive life sentences in Azkaban for crimes not listed in the book and was, at least at the time of printing, still alive. Harry checked the publishing information. A year ago. How that weak, pitiful, miserable excuse for a human being had been able to survive this long, even with the benefit of his animagus form, Harry had no idea.

It was so odd, knowing that who you thought you were supposed to be wasn't who the rest of the world thought you were supposed to be. Harry hoped he could find a journal or something written by this version of himself, so he could get a better idea of how to behave. He'd just found his family; the last thing he wanted was to be torn away because Dumbledore thought he was a renegade Death Eater impersonating Harry Potter or something.

As time marched on and day turned into night, Harry continued to read, totally unaware of the progression of time. Dinner passed without him noticing and it wasn't until his stomach rumbled noisily that he realized it'd been a while since he'd last eaten. Closing his book, he looked up... and found his parents and Sirius standing in the doorway. "Err... hello?"

"Hey, Prongslette. You missed dinner." Sirius leaned against the doorframe, looking around the library before fixing his gaze on Harry. "I had to eat twice as much to make up for you."

Harry snorted; that sounded like Sirius alright. "Sorry, Sirius. I was looking for what kind of snake that was, and then I got distracted by another book, and... well..." He spread his hands and gave a helpless shrug. Here they were, obviously, with him in the library having missed dinner.

"Son, are you sure nothing's bothering you? You're acting really strange. You haven't made fun of your sisters all day, you haven't tried to prank them even once, you just forgot 'uncle' when talking to Sirius, and you've been studying in the library all day." James shuddered, looking around as if something might surge out of the corner and attack him if he spent too long in the room. "You never study."

Harry wanted to groan but that would have called even more attention to him. This was getting to be a mess. He really needed to figure out who this Harry was and fast, before people started getting even more suspicious than they already were. "Yeah, Dad, I'm fine. I just was really curious about that snake, and then some of these other books just turned out to be really interesting." His father gave him a disbelieving look and Harry forced a chuckle. "I'm serious."

Just as he'd predicted, Sirius couldn't pass that one up. "No, you're Harry. I'm Sirius."

His parents groaned and began to mock Sirius for using the same joke yet again and Harry grinned; mission accomplished. Grabbing one of the books he hadn't finished yet, he stopped to give his mother a quick hug before sliding past them and leaving the library. Entering

his room, he cast a few locking and privacy charms on the door before dropping the book on his nightstand and changing into his pajamas.

Changing into his pajamas, though, made him very aware of another problem he now faced. To be blunt, he was a chubby little kid. Not quite Neville levels of plumpness, but getting there. Definitely not the lean, muscular figure he was used to. Harry made a mental note to start working out again. Even if he wasn't the Boy-Who-Lived in this world, he wasn't going to just sit back and let Voldemort run wild. Neville might be the only one capable of killing the bastard in this dimension because of Trelawney's damned prophecy, but that didn't mean he couldn't help. And kill a whole lot of Death Eaters along the way.

Setting his alarm clock for five in the morning, which would hopefully get him up before the rest of the family, Harry crawled into bed and fell asleep almost immediately.

The next month at Godric's Hollow was fun for Harry once he managed to settle in. It was just like he'd always dreamed life in a world with no Voldemort would have been like. He had two parents who loved him and even two sisters; it was like being back at the Burrow again, back in the days before his friendship with Ron imploded. Except here, he didn't feel bad about a poor family taking in yet another mouth to feed and could relax and enjoy things more. He'd even found a journal, stashed under the floorboard, written by this universe's original Harry. Having read that from cover to cover a few times, he was now doing a much better job of fitting in... or at least he was only arousing a little suspicion as he subtly began changing their expectations of him to match who he really was.

Returning from his five-mile morning run, Harry looked at the clock and smiled. He'd shaved another ten seconds off his previous best time. Excellent. The house was still as quiet as a tomb and so after using a few spells to freshen up (at least until he could take a proper shower), Harry decided it might be nice to treat his family to breakfast. After all, he was up and surely his mother would enjoy a break from

cooking. That, and after years with the Dursleys, it felt downright odd to be staying at home and NOT cooking every meal.

He worked briskly, cooking up large portions of French toast, eggs, sausage, biscuits, and pancakes. He'd seen in the past how much food his family could pack away, especially his father, although Jasmine and Rose weren't exactly pixies either. As much as it looked like on the counter, Harry severely doubted there'd be anything left when they were down. Footsteps on the stairs alerted him that his family was awake, and Harry grabbed the serving platters and bowls, moving them to the kitchen table. His mother and the twins were the first to arrive, stopping dead in the doorway and staring in disbelief at the breakfast he'd prepared. "Morning."

Jasmine was the first to break out of her stupor, edging towards the table while eyeing the food hungrily. "Wow, Harry. I never knew you could cook."

"Uhh, well, I can't. Or would that be couldn't? I found a cookbook in the library that had moving pictures so you could watch everything being done and then decided it didn't look too hard, so I figured I'd give it a try." Technically it was true... for the Harry of this universe. He'd tried it, too, failing miserably and scrambling to clean up the evidence before his mom came down to cook breakfast. This time around, though, Harry had succeeded, although it wasn't exactly his first time in the kitchen and he had actual skill rather than just having peeked at a book.

Lily just smiled and kissed Harry on the cheek. "I'm so proud of you, Harry." He blushed as his sisters mocked him, but their amusement at his expense didn't keep them from descending on the food like Ron Weasley, serving up heaping plates for themselves that they began to devour. His mother followed suit, biting into a piece of toast before letting out a moan that Harry had previously only heard when he interrupted romantic interludes while on patrol. Well then. Evidently she liked his cooking?

"Hey, what's that smell?" James was the last to make his presence known, stumbling into the kitchen with his hair mussed and standing

up strangely. "Wow, this looks amazing. I knew I married you for a reason, Lily!"

Giggling, Lily let James kiss her before shaking her head. "Sorry, honey, but I wasn't the one cooking this time..."

James arched a brow at that and looked around at his children. "What? Then it must have been my beautiful daughters. Nothing like getting an early start on essential life skills. Way to go!"

"Sorry to burst your bubble, Dad, but we didn't cook this." Rose grinned and pointed across the table. "Harry did." Her sister nodded in agreement, spearing some eggs with her fork and sticking them in her mouth.

"What? Harry?" James's jaw dropped as he turned to his eldest. "You cooked it? Wow. When did you learn how to..."

"Wow!" Everyone turned to look at Jasmine, who was staring at Harry with wide eyes. "This is great! Sorry, mum, but Harry's a way better cook than you. No offense."

The others looked at Jasmine in disbelief before digging in as well. James stared at the food suspiciously. "What? No way, your mom has the best cooking I've had since I left Hogwarts." He took a bite of French toast and his eyes went wide. "Erm, Lily flower? Am I going to end up sleeping on the couch if I agree with the kids? Because this is amazing."

Lily shook her head slowly. "No, because then I'd have to put myself on the couch too. Harry, this is wonderful. Would you like to cook breakfast from now on?"

Looking up from where he was cutting up a piece of French toast for himself, Harry blushed at the compliments. "Honestly, it was just going to be a one-time thing. I wanted to give you the morning off because you cook all the time."

"Can't you give me all the mornings off then?" Lily held up a piece of sausage speared on the end of her fork. "Seriously, Harry, your cooking is way better than mine and..."

As much as he loved his new family, he had no desire to be trapped in a situation like at the Dursleys and Harry held up his hand. "It's okay, mom. I'll help out and do breakfast sometimes, but I won't cook all the time. I like your cooking too, you know." Well, most of the time. Some of the stuff she came up with was truly bizarre, especially when Amy leant her cookbooks of traditional American cuisine. What in the world was 'chicken fried steak'? He understood the 'fried steak' part, but what did chickens have to do with it?

Lily smiled and kissed him on the cheek. "Okay. And thank you for cooking this morning, it was sweet of you. I'm sure the girls are going to be all over you when you're older. A man who knows how to be useful around the house is hard to find." James made an indignant noise at this and the family went back to eating, chattering about everything and yet nothing at all over breakfast.

After everyone had finished eating, James threw a pinch of floo powder into the fireplace and stuck his head in for a moment before pulling back. The fire turned orange for only a moment before burning green again, and Sirius and his family emerged. "Hey guys. Ooh, what smells good? Lily, are you taking cooking classes or something? It smells better than usual here."

Lily just smiled and pointed at Harry as Sirius rushed over to the table, conjuring up a wooden fork as he dodged around the others, stealing bits here and there from James and the kids. "Nope! It was all Harry. He decided to give me the morning off and do the cooking. Isn't that sweet?"

"What?" Sirius jaw dropped, and Jasmine squealed in disgust as a half-chewed piece of egg dropped onto the table next to her. Grimacing, he waved his wand and banished the mess before staring at Harry in disbelief. "You cook now? Since when? You're not getting soft on your father and I, are you? You'd better not stop doing pranks! You've got to live up to... ouch! Lily!"

Harry just smirked and went back to cleaning up as his mother and the newly arrived Amy rounded on Sirius.

When everyone was finished eating, the members of the two families again spread out over the house and backyard to pursue their own interests. Harry went up to his room, retrieving the copy of *Hogwarts: A History* he'd found in the library before curling up in a chair in the living room. Who would have thought the book was so interesting? Well, apart from Hermione. It also helped him see that, apart from who Voldemort attacked, the only differences between the two realities were those in the last ten years or so. Slytherin wasn't suddenly a hero of the wizarding world, and it was still Helga rather than Herbert Hufflepuff or something bizarre like that. Comforting to know that he could at least expect school to be familiar, even if the people around him weren't.

He was left largely alone for at least an hour, which was when someone perching on the arm of his chair interrupted his solitude. Looking up, he found himself staring into the blue-green eyes of Cassie. His other self's journal had done him a world of good in understanding the brunette: she crushed on him, the twins didn't approve, and his original self had thought girls were gross. He, on the other hand, saw the value in making friends with Cassie. If she persisted in crushing on him, he could be in for a world of trouble when her aura manifested. He knew he could easily repress a quarter-Veela's general aura, but he'd never tried a half-Veela or a Veela who was specifically interested in him. Not to mention a woman scorned with the ability to warp most men into willing servants was a very dangerous woman indeed. So being far nicer to Cassie was near the top of his to-do list and now was the perfect time to start, at least in his mind. "Wotcher, Cassie."

"Hiya." Blushing, Cassie fidgeted on the arm of his chair, causing Harry to instinctively wrap one arm around her waist to still her the way he did with Hermione when she was excited. That just made her blush darker and Harry quickly pulled his arm away from her. Her hand shot out, grabbing his wrist and halting his retreat as she examined him. "Wow. Have you been working out?"

Oh, this was convenient. He could tie together two unusual behaviors with one lie. "Yeah. I heard that fit wizards are more powerful, so I've been running in the morning. Strong body, strong magical core and all that. Then I started trying to cook some for myself because I was always really hungry after." Cassie nodded at that one; it did sound sensible enough. Gently prying his arm out of her grasp, Harry cast about for a question that would turn the conversation away from himself. "Can you cook? Both your parents are purebloods and most of them think housekeeping is 'woman's work'... not that Uncle Sirius or Dad would ever let my mum catch them saying that."

Cassie nodded, a small frown on her face. "I try to cook, but I'm pants at it. I think even my dad is better than I am, and he managed to blow up that muggle toaster your mum bought him. It's okay, though. I have years to get the hang of it before I'm married and need to cook for my family."

As much as he wanted to, Harry resisted the urge to comment on that. After all, while neither the Blacks nor Weasleys were dark, both retained the somewhat male chauvinist ideas about the world that were popular in the wizarding world. It was just the way society operated. So instead of urging her to throw off the shackles of the patriarchy and tell men where to shove it when they asked her to cook dinner, Harry decided on another route, one that would also advance his friend agenda. "If you want, maybe your dad will let you floo over here in the mornings. I'm going to be cooking breakfast sometime now and helping Mum with cooking when she does it. You could learn from us."

"Really? Oh, thanks Harry!" Cassie threw herself into his lap, hugging him tight. Harry just patted her awkwardly on the back. Wait a second. Was this really going to help with the crush problem, on second thought? After pondering the matter for a few seconds, Harry decided it likely would. Hopefully forcing her to spend time around him in such a mundane activity instead of admiring him from afar would show her that he was just Harry, rather than something worth getting worked up about.

Besides, they'd grown up together thanks to the closeness of their families. She was practically his sister. Cassie crushing on him was just... wrong.

When the day of his birthday arrived, Harry received another first: the first birthday party ever thrown for him by his family. While it wasn't too different from spending it with the Weasleys, apart from the people present, it was the fact that it was HIS family that made it special for him. The Blacks were obviously there, as was Remus and a number of children from around Godric's Hollow. One thing was for sure, he wasn't the Boy-Who-Lived anymore but he sure did well enough when it came to attracting admirers.

That afternoon, they went down to a nearby river to go swimming and the secret he'd managed to hide from everyone save Cassie came out, much to his annoyance. Unsurprisingly, when his father noticed, he just went ahead and blurted out his thoughts instead of showing discretion and asking Harry later. "Whoa. Harry, have you been working out? You're not a chubby little munchkin anymore."

"James!"

"What? He was getting a bit pudgy..."

"A bit?"

"SIRIUS!"

Luckily, Harry had thought someone would notice a while ago and had already prepared an excuse, testing it on Cassie to see if it would fly before trying it on adults. "Well, I'm going off to school this year and I saw in one of the books I was reading that fit wizards are stronger because the body and magical core are connected. So I started working out a bit."

That made his father smile and exchange high-fives with Sirius. Harry just shook his head at how simple-minded his father was; not that he didn't love the man, but there were two very obvious blind spots that anyone could use to distract him: quidditch and becoming a strong

wizard. As long as any of his lies were about one or the other, he'd be safe.

His mother, on the other hand, was looking at him a bit oddly but it fit with his sudden new obsession with studying and school so after a moment, she just smiled and went back to watching his siblings. Harry sighed in relief. For some reason... maybe he was a momma's boy, but he found lying to her a lot harder than lying to his father. And he actually felt guilty about it after.

Little did they know he was already strong. Strong enough that he had to make a conscious effort to suppress his power, lest he light up sensors as brightly as Dumbledore and attract the attention of those capable of sensing such things. Thankfully he was still young and so a few slips of control and power spikes were to be expected. Hopefully he could disguise most of his slips as 'accidental magic', and then 'grow up' and slowly let people see the true extent of his power. If that failed... well, Harry would figure out Plan B if and when he needed to.

Perhaps he could go strike up a friendship with Lockhart and learn the finer points of quality obliviation, instead of the brute force method he'd generally used during the war? Dumbledore would be a challenge on that front, but he'd manage. When it came to person-to-person spellcasting, it was merely a battle between the power of the caster and the power of the recipient... and his power was hard to match.

Later that day, Harry received an owl from Hogwarts inviting him to attend and faked jumping for joy and all the other antics he figured were probably appropriate for a kid his physical age. Like there'd been any doubt he'd be attending his parents' alma mater. Their smiles seemed a bit strained, and it took him a moment to realize why: their first child was leaving the nest, even if it was only for ten months at a time. It had to be hard for them.

Unsurprisingly, Harry received a visitor that evening while reading in bed: his mother. He ignored her opening the door to check on him, used to her making the rounds each night, but when she entered his

room and sat on the end of his bed, he put a bookmark in to track his page and dropped his book on the nightstand. "Harry?"

"Yes, Mum?"

Lily leaned over, wrapping her arms around him. "Harry honey, I'm going to miss you when you go off to Hogwarts."

Oh bugger, she was sniffing. Harry hated crying women. Patting her on the back, he tried to make a joke. "No, you're just going to miss the chocolate chip muffins I bake for breakfast once a week." Lily let out a watery chuckle. "And bacon that's not burnt on one end."

"How do you do that, anyways?" Lily let go of him, using her wand to conjure up a handkerchief and wipe her eyes.

Harry shrugged, a small grin on his lips. "Burner's not working quite right. The heat's not even so unless you move the bacon around while it's cooking, there's one part that gets cooked more than the rest. Might wanna get that looked at."

That made her stop and blink for a moment. Likely she wasn't even aware magical stoves could be imperfect. Unlike muggle technology, the fact that wizarding appliances ran on magic generally meant that it either worked... or it didn't. Stoves were one of the few things Harry could think of that could keep working, albeit not working right, as time went on. "Oh. I'll tell your father to have someone come and check it out. Thanks, Harry." She sighed, ruffling his hair. "You're turning into such a little genius. Just like me. Thank God; I was worried you'd turn out like your father."

That caught Harry's attention; it was the first time he'd ever heard one parent speak ill of the other to any degree. "Oh?"

"I don't want to speak badly of your father... but he wasn't the best person when he was back in school. He liked to prank people, make fun of them... he was a bully, Harry." Lily sighed, leaning back and staring up at the ceiling. "He grew out of it, of course, and I fell in love with him and we married, but the way you'd been acting, it was like

him all over again. I'm so glad you've started growing up already, instead of taking till sixth year like he did."

Harry decided to take advantage of the moment to steal another hug, something he couldn't get enough of even after two months of having his mother around. "We should cut one of the twins' hair short and dye it black. She can be like Dad and I'll be the one with the brains, just like you. After all, I can't imagine having a better role model for who I'd want to be when I grow up than you, Mum."

A moment later, Harry regretted that as his mother teared up again and pulled him into a hug, crying on his shoulder.

Joe's Note: Removed some more of the creepy mom lusting that SilverAegis wrote into the original, because... eww. Also, I'm sorry, your eleven year-old whips out a knife, "no mom, it's a dagger!" (like that's any better) and it not only rates no further discussion but no punishment? Yeah, that's gone too. Harry still has a bit of fun at Ollivander's expense though. Ooooh, and you'll probably notice a bit of oddness with Parvati's name here. I opted to revert to a more traditional spelling of the name, which is the way it's spelled when referring to the goddess. Read 'n review!

When Harry woke up early the next morning, he felt someone warm lying next to him. Opening his eyes, he blinked and tried to process what he was seeing. A redhead was lying in bed with him... Ginny? Had he gone back to his old universe, just before the battle with Voldemort? Or slid through time and space again to another new universe? Then he wandlessly summoned his glasses and put them on, the fuzzy world snapping into crystal clarity.

Oh. It was his mother. Right, last night had ended with the talking, then the crying, then more talking until she ended up running out of energy and falling asleep in his bed.

Wow, the fact that he'd made that particular association said more about the love of his former life than he cared to think about. Yikes. Oh well. Who cared if he was a hair Oedipal? As long as he didn't go killing his father or shagging his mother, everything was fine, right?

Sneaking out of bed was a bit more difficult than he anticipated, owing to his smaller body, but he succeeded and made his way down to the kitchen to start breakfast. Today he was going to Diagon Alley to get his supplies. He'd tried to talk his parents into letting him go alone, but alas it was not to be. Which was understandable; they thought he was an eleven year-old with no magical ability and no way to defend himself. Still, he knew Ollivander's was going to cause problems for him and Harry wished he could make at least that part of the trip alone.

At least his father would be stuck here minding the other kids. With only him going off to Hogwarts this year, it didn't make sense to turn the shopping trip into a family outing and so Harry and his mother

were going alone. It worked out well for Harry; he was a lot closer to his mother than his father now and if anything odd happened, she'd be a lot easier to talk into hiding his secrets, even from her own husband.

As he trooped down the steps, Harry realized that this morning's mistaken identity was the first time he'd thought about Ginny since he'd arrived. It was hard to raise the emotions he'd had before, grief and longing for her presence again, when he knew that in a thirteen months she'd be walking the halls of Hogwarts with him once more. She wasn't gone anymore, so why mourn her death?

This time around, though, he was going to ask Ginny out in fourth year and take her to the Yule Ball. In the old universe, she'd gone through Michael Corner, Dean Thomas, and a few other boyfriends before they started dating, but he hadn't cared because he loved her. But why let others touch his Ginny if he didn't have to? Likewise, he wouldn't mind skipping out on his disastrous date with Pārvatī, his utter failure at a relationship with Cho, or his trip to Slughorn's Christmas party with Luna (not that he disliked Luna, he just liked Ginny more), if it meant he could be with Ginny for all them.

Harry was snapped out of his thoughts when his mother kissed him on the cheek, joining him at the stove as he prepared breakfast for the family. Now that he was either doing the entire meal or at least helping each morning as well as helping with the other two meals every day, his sisters were getting off easy and were quite happy about the fact. He didn't mind, though. It gave him plenty of time to spend with his mother and it cut down on the overall amount of whining in the house now that they weren't being forced to cook against their will.

The amount of burnt food making it to the kitchen table had decreased markedly since he'd replaced them as Lily's primary kitchen helper. Whether they actually lacked domestic skills and his parents were too stubborn to let them stop, or it was a passive-aggressive attack for being forced to do something they disliked, Harry wasn't sure. But whatever the reason, burnt food was still burnt and he was glad he didn't have to eat it anymore.

When they were done, they moved the food to the kitchen table and Harry went for the door, intending to go wake up his dad and siblings. "Harry." He stopped, looking back at his mother, who shook her head. "We're going to eat without them and leave early. Sooner we're there, sooner we'll be done and back, okay?"

Made sense. Harry murmured his assent and sat down at the table, quickly assembling a plate of food and getting to work on it. The more time he spent with her, the more he was sure that Hermione had somehow managed to possess a redheaded body and come back in time. Lily reminded him of Hermione before the final battle... or maybe it should be the other way around. Both were smart, strict when they needed to be, kind when they didn't, and overbearing in a protective, motherly way. Granted his mother was a bit more outgoing and creative than Hermione, but they were still very similar. Maybe that's why he was so drawn to Lily in this time and place? Or maybe it was why he'd befriended Hermione in his native reality? Chicken or the egg? Egg or the chicken?

After they finished eating breakfast, Lily cast stasis charms over the remainder of the food to keep it hot and fresh for the others. Then, with a pinch of floo powder, they were off through the network to London, crossing the immense distance in a matter of seconds and emerging in the dining room of the Leaky Cauldron.

Nobody reacted apart from a simple nod of Tom's head, which was a novel experience for Harry. Ever since his first visit to the wizarding world with Hagrid, he'd been mobbed most anywhere he went. Well, except for fifth year, but that didn't count because the Ministry had turned the population against him. But now... nobody knew who he was. Nobody cared. It was bloody awesome, to borrow one of Ron's favorites.

Their first stop after entering the Alley was Gringotts, much to Harry's displeasure. Unfortunately, he couldn't articulate WHY he was ill at ease around the goblins without sharing his entire story with his mother. But after watching the goblins side with Voldemort in an attempt to gain more rights than the Ministry was willing to give them, Harry could barely resist the urge to start throwing hexes as his

mother led him to the teller's counter, then down to their vault in one of the carts.

Humanity had ultimately gotten the last laugh, though. The Order of the Phoenix, lead by Dumbledore and Harry himself, had decided to drop by and show the goblins the error of their ways. While the wards had held out for two days, as the goblins waited desperately for reinforcements from their Dark Lord, Ginny had ultimately been the downfall of Gringotts. She'd flooded to remind Harry that he was missing their six month anniversary, images of what he should have been doing instead of laying siege to goblins had popped into his head, and one almighty burst of power had brought the wards crashing down, killing a number of goblins who had tied their magical cores to the wards.

The goblins had then surrendered to the Ministry.

It was decidedly odd to see people actually in Gringotts again. After the betrayal, siege, and reclamation of the sole wizarding bank, most people had withdrawn their money. While the economy hadn't collapsed entirely, since people still had to go to work and pay for items and services rendered, it had taken a major hit as credit, loans, and other complex forms of finance ceased to exist. As they exited into the bright sunlight, Harry put it out of his mind. That had never happened here and, unless he seriously screwed something up, never would.

Although sometimes walking past stores would conjure up memories of the past, like the currently empty storefront that would someday house Fred and George's dream, Harry mostly managed to keep his mind on the present, thanks largely in part to his mother. Who would have thought that shopping could actually be somewhat fun? His first time around had been, but second year was marred by the Malfoys and the Lockhart incident, third year by having to look over his shoulder for Sirius Black, and after that, when he did make it out, the cloud of Voldemort's second rise had hung over them all.

Their first stop was Madam Malkin's for his school robes and some other new clothes he could wear on nights and weekends. It was something he'd never found too enjoyable, but being fitted and

picking out clothes was a lot more fun with his mother there to tease him and make suggestions.

It was while he was in Madam Malkin's that Harry saw one of the first connections to his old world, apart from Remus and Sirius. After selecting a few outfits he wanted in addition to the school uniform he needed to buy for that fall, Harry was led back to a corner of the store with platforms for measuring the patrons and making the necessary adjustments to their purchases. All three spots were occupied, though, with three very familiar faces.

Well, two very familiar faces and one fairly familiar one. He'd never seen Pārvatī sneer quite like that in his original world, much less at her own sister. "Can't believe our parents still can't tell us apart even after ten years. Oh well. Sucks to be you, I suppose. Hope you enjoy being grounded for a week, bookworm."

Rolling her eyes, Padma kept her arms out from her sides as one of Malkin's assistants adjusted her black Hogwarts robe. "Whatever you say, sister. Just make sure you return the clothes you borrowed from my dresser, or I'll start trying out human transfiguration on you and let father clean up the mess. I like that sweater." Sighing, Padma shook her head. "One of these days, maybe you'll figure out that negative attention isn't better than no attention at all."

"Nagging bore."

"Attention seeking brat."

Huh. That was interesting. While Harry was very well aware that Padma and Pārvatī were different people, he'd never seen them being openly antagonistic to each other. A bemused disinterest at most; Padma preferring the less 'wooly' subjects like Ancient Runes and Arithmancy instead of her sister's predilection for Divination, while Pārvatī wasn't too impressed with her sister's overly studious behavior. Still, they at least got along most of the time. These two weren't quite at Harry and Draco levels of enmity, but they definitely didn't seem friendly to him either.

The third and closest platform was occupied by Li Su, who stood there stoically as her neighbors sniped at each other and a seamstress adjusted the hem of one of her black uniform skirts. Harry stared at her for a moment, debating whether or not to approach her. While she hadn't occupied a position in his inner circle of friends, she'd been in the intermediate ring: members of the DA he was closer to than the average student. And while he hadn't made her acquaintance until sixth year originally, he could change that this time around.

Especially given he had an advantage over his peers when it came to making friends: he knew roughly how people were going to turn out as they got older and didn't have to worry about attaching himself to someone who seemed interesting in the here and now but would turn out to hurt him in the end.

In Su's case, Harry knew the future her was extremely bright even for a girl from the house of that valued intelligence, as well as learning magic from her homeland that even accomplished British duelers found difficult to counter due to the unfamiliar spells. And she'd grown into a bloody gorgeous young woman to boot. It was like Cho without the waterworks and a more potent wand. Harry knew he could learn a lot from her, while still teaching her to master Italic defensive magic she found difficult, which presented a win-win situation for both of them. He learned, she learned... and he had damn good scenery the entire time. Win-win-win?

Mind made up, Harry took a step forward and waited until her brown eyes landed on him before smiling. "Hi. I'm Harry Potter. You going into your first year at Hogwarts too?"

Su nodded, looking over at the Patil twins before jerking her head towards the empty space on the other side of her. Harry sidled up beside her and she lowered her voice. "Thank Merlin, someone in my year with at least a tiny bit of courtesy. My mother would tan my hide if I was behaving like that in public. Family problems are supposed to stay in the family, not get spread around for everyone to hear. I'm Li Su. Call me Su, because..."

"In China, the last name comes first." Su's eyes widened and Harry grinned. "How about you don't assume all British wizards are the same and I won't ask you if you like eating sushi or what the weather's like near the Korean Academy."

Leaning her head back, Su let out the first real laugh Harry had heard from her in either world. "Oh, I think I'm going to like you, Harry Potter. Deal. Now, what house do you think you're going to be in? I've spent most of my life traveling with my parents and now that I'm back in Britain for school, it seems like it's all kids can talk about..."

Harry bit his lip uncertainly as his mind raced; he knew that Su was supposed to end up in Ravenclaw and his words could influence her, sending her to another house the way Hagrid and Ron had influenced him by instilling a distaste for Slytherin that Malfoy only reinforced. But... well, he could have a little fun with it. "Let's just say I'm glad M comes before P in the alphabet. There's this little prat named Draco Malfoy... anywhere he's not is fine with me."

"Ah. You're doubly lucky." Harry raised an eyebrow and Su jerked her head towards the twins. "L comes before P, but Po comes after Pa."

Harry laughed.

Half an hour later, Harry had finally been fitted for his uniforms and parted ways with Su, promising to send the family's owl her way with a letter sometime before school started. Harry held the door open for his mother as he mentally debated where to go next, and then saw something that brought him up short. It was Neville with two vaguely familiar figures who he could only assume were the healthy versions of Frank and Alice Longbottom. Instead of the meek boy he had seen in his first year at Hogwarts, though, this one seemed stuck up and spoiled. Almost... Draco Malfoy, he realized. This Neville reminded him of Draco.

Neville passed in front of them, whining about how first years weren't allowed to bring brooms to Hogwarts, and Harry watched as his mother exchanged looks with Neville's parents. Unfriendly looks. Interesting. As soon as they were out of earshot, Harry tugged on the sleeve of his mother's robes. "So, that was the Boy-Who-Lived. I take

it you don't like them?" He knew his parents and Neville's had been friends in his old universe, but he now realized he'd heard nothing about the Longbottoms from his parents in this one.

"How..?" Lily looked at him in surprise and Harry grinned before imitating the glare she'd just given Alice Longbottom. His mother sighed and gave him a wry grin. "Right. Well, I used to like them. Alice and I were actually really good friends before THAT Halloween, and your father and Frank got on well enough. Then their son became the Boy-Who-Lived and suddenly they're acting like the world should bow down and kiss their feet. Frank almost got your father demoted at work because he wanted to be an auror captain too, but luckily Alastor Moody was retiring and a position opened up. And Alice decided I wasn't good enough to spend time with anymore, since she could spend her days having tea parties and gossiping with society's elite. Quit her job as an auror and everything so she could. They used to be such nice people, but now... they're practically the Malfoys."

Oh eww. So much for his idea of helping Neville beat Voldemort. Even if Neville was the savior of the wizarding world (or the one supposed to be), Harry didn't think he'd be able to work with someone so similar to his former school nemesis. Maybe he could destroy the horcruxes on his own and then find a way to remove Voldemort without Neville's help? There was plenty of time to think about that, though. He couldn't make a move until Voldemort was back in a physical body he could destroy... and couldn't exactly go horcrux hunting as an eleven year-old with parents who were watching over him.

Harry grabbed his mother's hand, leading her away toward Magical Menagerie. As much as he loved Hedwig, he wasn't sure he'd be able to handle having an owl that was his and yet not all over again. So he figured a trip to look at the other pets was in order, to see if something caught his eye. Alas, though, he realized a flaw in his plan as he went from tank to cage to basket, looking over the different animals. He definitely wasn't a toad person. Rats reminded him of Pettigrew. And cats were cute and all, but not for him either. Hmm. So an owl it was, evidently. Then he realized something. "Mum? Can

we go back to the Leaky Cauldron and have Jasmine or Rose floo over? Maybe both?"

"I'm not sure they're awake and dressed yet, sweetie." Lily furrowed her brow, most likely trying to figure out the reasoning behind his request. "Why?"

Gesturing to the pets around him, Harry sighed. "None of the first year pets really seem to fit me. I thought we could ask my sisters if one of them wanted an owl. They pick out the owl, I take it to Hogwarts this year, and next year they can have the owl back and I can get a better pet." Lily opened her mouth but Harry cut her off. "In Hogwarts: A History, it says second years and above can have any pet that isn't a threat to the safety of their fellow students."

Lily just beamed at him. "You're so smart. I didn't find that one out until fourth year and that was only because a prefect told me. Alright, let's go see if your sisters have decided to crawl out of bed yet."

In the end, irony was a cruel mistress. Jasmine had come through the floo to the Leaky Cauldron and joined them on a trip to Eeylops Owl Emporium, only to come out a few minutes later... with Hedwig. The owl eyed him balefully, as if to say 'Why aren't YOU buying me?' Thankfully, though, Jasmine was in a hurry to show off her new pet and disappeared back through the floo to Godric's Hollow, and Harry and Lily went back to their shopping. After a quick visit to the apothecary to pick up a cauldron, scales, and ingredients, Harry was left needing books and a wand. "Mum? Can I use your schoolbooks? They're all the same, right?"

"I... think so, yes." Lily gave him an odd look for the question. "Why? It's not like we need to save money."

Harry didn't want to go with the truth, which was that he was hoping for a repeat of the Half-Blood Prince incident and was only starting now so his mother wouldn't get suspicious, which she probably would if he waited until fifth or sixth year to demand her books in hopes of finding tips and new spells. So instead, he decided to try something a bit sappier. "Well this is going to be the first time I'm leaving the house for more than a few days. It'll help me feel close to you while

I'm at school. And... well, I bet Dad probably drew all over his or something."

Throwing her arms around him, his mother sniffled and hugged him tight. "That's so sweet, Harry. Of course you can use my books. I still have all seven years in my trunk in the attic, so we'll be set unless they change the course requirements. We can still visit Flourish and Blott's, though, to see if there's anything you find interesting. But now... let's see if we can find you a wand, okay?"

As much as he wasn't looking forward to this, Harry nodded and the two trooped down the alley to Ollivander's. Just as they arrived, the Longbottoms exited looking grim, Neville staring down at a very familiar wand with an odd look on his face. Harry sighed. So much for him getting his old holly and phoenix feather wand back. That ought to make the shopping experience interesting, to say the least.

The moment they entered, Harry sensed Ollivander skulking around behind them under an invisibly spell, the massive amount of magic required to achieve true invisibility prickling at his senses. Smirking, he decided to have a little fun while flexing his magic for the first time since arriving in this universe. It was a simple derivation of the lightning spells he threw around in real combat, transformed with Hermione's help to stun and cause pain instead of killing after he'd been exposed to an interesting weapon carried by the muggle bobbies in London. So as soon as Ollivander dropped the spell, opening his mouth to speak, Harry whirled and brought his hand up before unleashing a burst of lightning. Thunder boomed inside the narrow confines of the shop, shattering all the windows at once as blue electricity played over the wandmaker's body.

Unlike when he struck down his enemies, though, Harry wasn't using true lightning on the old man. This was a burst of high voltage, low amperage electricity (in Hermione's words) that was strong enough to disrupt the person's nervous system without frying them from the inside out. Ollivander collapsed in a twitching heap and Harry ended the spell, quickly dodging behind his mother as if scared.

There was dead silence in the shop for a long moment before Ollivander gave a wheezy chuckle from his spot on the floor. "I do

believe that is the most interesting reaction I've had to my normal antics in the last several hundred years. Perhaps it's time for me to stop trying to scare my patrons when they enter."

"Oh Merlin, I'm so sorry! I've never seen Harry do something like that before." Lily rushed over, helping the old man up while fixing her son with an odd look.

Harry did his best to look scared, looking down at his hands as he wrung them. "I'm sorry! He scared me and I couldn't help it. I thought he was going to hurt me and so I wanted to be safe and just... pushed."

Letting Lily pull him to his feet, Ollivander waved the apologies away. "This is not the first bout of accidental magic I have seen in my life, young man. Far from it. Just the most unusual. Now, however, I do believe you are here for a purpose, no? Lily Potter née Evans, ten and a quarter inches, willow with a unicorn hair core. Excellent for charms work. Your husband, on the other hand, uses an eleven inch mahogany wand with a dragon heartstring that lends itself well to transfiguration. Sometimes the apple does not fall far from the tree... and other times it does. Let's see which is true for young Harry."

Even though he was effectively ambidextrous after his training with the Order of the Phoenix, Harry offered up his right hand when asked and let the magical tape measure roam over his body as Ollivander went through his speech about the wand choosing the wizard and other such things he surely would have wanted to know... if he hadn't heard it seven years previous. After disappearing into the back for a few minutes, Ollivander returned to the front counter with a half-dozen boxes and the painstaking process of matching him to a wand began.

With 'his' holly and phoenix feather wand already in the hands of Neville, Harry wasn't surprised when the search for a proper wand dragged on even longer than the first time. When it hit the hour mark, though, Harry started getting worried. What if his magic was only compatible with Voldemort's wand's brother and the one Dumbledore had given him? He couldn't very well produce either of them to use, since too many questions would be asked, and going to the

headmaster to take this universe's version of his secondary wand would cause just as many problems. Blast. Hopefully Ollivander would come through...

Finally, Ollivander came forward with a wooden box that, while utterly unknown to Harry, had something about it that was familiar: tendrils of the same odd metal that adorned his second wand were present on this box as well. "This... this is not one of my wands. It was made its way to my family in roughly 800 CE and has been waiting for its master to come ever since. Perhaps... perhaps that person is you, young Potter."

The wand inside the box made Harry gasp, not in awe like Ollivander and his mother would probably assume, but in recognition. It was... wait. His eyes narrowed. It was similar to his secondary wand, but was in fact a different wand. The tendrils of metal were slimmer and almost feminine, the wood a hair lighter as well. "What is it?"

"I am sure you are aware that the 'gods' the Greek muggles worshipped were, in fact, just very powerful wizards, correct?" Harry nodded his assent and Ollivander continued the story. "The same was true of the Norse gods. One of the strongest and best known was the 'God of Thunder', Thor Odinson. Outside the town of Fritzlar, Germany, once stood a tree known as 'Thor's Oak', one of the most sacred sites of both wizards and pagan muggles at the time. It was there that Thor and his daughter Þrúðr would often meet with their worshippers."

"But Thor was 'god' to a large number of people and had to travel far and wide to ensure all of them received adequate attention. While he was gone one month in 723 CE, a Christian muggle came to the town to convert the muggle townspeople. He made a deal with the locals: they would allow him to strike the tree with an axe once. If Thor did not strike him down for his blasphemy, they would convert to Christianity and allow him to fell the tree to build a church." Ollivander shook his head slowly, a wry smile on his lips. "Alas, Thor was in what is modern day Oslo at the time."

"When he returned to the area, he was furious as being abandoned by the muggles. After removing a piece of the church to keep for his

own uses, Thor destroyed it utterly before taking the wood and, or so the legends go, shaping it into two wands. One was the wand he used for the rest of his life, and has been long lost to the wizarding world. The other, he gifted to his daughter Þrúðr, who passed it to her son, who gave it to an ancestor of mine for safekeeping." Harry's eyes widened in surprised, and Ollivander nodded at the wand in the box. "Yes, Harry Potter. This is the wand of Þrúðr Thordotter. Try it."

Holding his hand over the wand, Harry could already feel the tendrils of magic between it and him before his fingers even touched it. Then, the wand jumped the last few inches and leapt into his hand, fingers curling instinctively around it as tendrils of lightning crawled up his arm. Images raced before Harry's eyes, of Viking warriors being led into battle by a gorgeous redhead swinging an axe with a blazing blue head. An axe. With barely a thought, the wand in his hand warped and reformed, the wood lengthening noticeably before the metal oozed up to form the head. Tipping his head back, he thrust the axe upward. "Jeg har kommet tilbake!"

The lightning playing over Harry's body rocketed upward, blowing a hole in the roof of the shop as it escaped up into the sky. It was answered by a return bolt of lightning that struck the head of the axe, making Harry gasp as a fiery feeling tore through his body. It was only the experience of numerous bouts of Cruciatus Curse at the hands of Voldemort that kept him from dropping to his knees, and even then he was sorely tempted.

Finally the pain stopped and Harry gasped in relief, sparing a thought to return his new wand to its natural state. He found Ollivander and his mother staring at him in wide-eyed disbelief and he shot them a sheepish grin before looking up at the hole in the ceiling. "Erm, Mum? I don't think we took enough gold out of the vault to pay for that..."

As the door shut behind his now-satisfied customers, Ollivander stared up at the hole in his ceiling in disbelief. He'd seen a lot of destruction in his many years of fitting wands to customers who had practically no magical control, but this... this took the cake. Sighing, he conjured a temporary magical seal in case it rained. He'd contact Gringotts at the end of the day to have the goblins come repair and reinforce the building.

What an oh so interesting day. Not only had he sold the brother wand to young Tom Riddle's now infamous yew wand, but he'd found the partner of Prúďr's legendary wand as well. Heading to the rear of his shop, he sat down at his desk and contemplated a piece of parchment. Dumbledore would need to know about the Longbottom boy having that particular wand... but what of young Potter?

After a long minute, he shook his head. No, Dumbledore didn't need to know about Harry Potter and his wand until he found out about it himself. While Ollivander had no doubt the young man was headed for great things, he wanted them to be the great things the boy himself wanted... not the great things that Dumbledore guided him into doing.

Manipulative coot.

Joe's Note: I know the end of the first scene seems a bit too infodump but, while it's not critical per say, it does serve a purpose. After all, if you don't know who the players in Harry's universe were and what he thought about them, you don't have any basis for comparison when he meets the new versions in this world.

Also, while Harry's mind is seventeen, he's eleven in body and so I won't be doing anything couple-wise for a bit... eww. But I am interested in what you guys would be interested in seeing. By the end of this chapter, you'll have an idea as to one pairing I WON'T consider, but outside of that... drop a review with your suggestions. While I have an outline for the fic going, it has nothing pairing-wise in it and so I'm fairly fluid on that front. And people? If you're going to leave an anonymous review, can you leave an email if you're going to ask questions? Because it makes it rather impossible to respond if you don't.

After leaving Ollivander's, Harry noticed his mother was strangely silent as they made their way to Flourish and Blott's. "Mum?" She made a vaguely inquisitive noise, reminding him a bit of how he handled Hermione in those last days before coming to this world. Maybe that's where he got it from? "I'm still Harry, you know. I just have a... well, a bloody awesome wand."

"Language, Harry." Lily stopped for a moment and sighed before turning and hugging him tightly. "I know you are, sweetie. It's just... that wand is older than Hogwarts. And you called down a bolt of lightning from a clear sky. That's not what I was expecting. I mean... I have a galleon bet with your father as to whether you'll get a charms-friendly wand like mine or a transfiguration-oriented one like his. How am I going to explain THAT thing?"

Harry held his wand up and grinned, willing a tiny bolt of electricity to shoot out of the end. "Tell him it's a charms wand and if he won't give you the galleon, I'll zap him in the arse till he does? We can split the take fifty-fifty."

That suggestion made Lily pause. "You know, just when I think you're turning out to be just like me, you say something that reminds me so

much of your father it's scary." Then she grinned. "And deal. Now let's go buy some books."

Upon entering the store, Lily headed for the charms section while he instinctively went for the DADA books. With his newfound bookworm reputation, Harry figured if he got an advanced book or two, he could get away with using at least some of the spells he knew by the end of first year or maybe the summer after. And who knew, they might even have a book or two he'd never studied before.

Harry was glad that his parents provided him with four galleons a week in allowance, allowing him to buy a pair of books on his own before his mother made it up to the counter. He slid the rest of his acquisitions in with hers and let the clerk ring up the entire pile, covertly shrinking his two and sliding them into his pocket. The two-dozen new books were bagged and shrunk by the clerk, and then the pair returned to the Leaky Cauldron so they could floo back home.

Upon their return, the two were lucky enough to make it past the rest of the family and up the stairs to Harry's room, where Lily restored their various packages to full size before heading up into the attic in search of her first year books and a trunk for him to use. Harry waited until her footsteps were halfway up the attic stairs before whipping out his new wand and getting to work. Each uniform was pressed and folded into a neat pile, then his black robes as well. Each vial of potions ingredients was already neatly organized in a box he'd acquired at the apothecary and he floated it up and into his cauldron just to minimize the space it would consume. Casting a critical eye around his room, he flicked his wand and began summoning books he'd want to bring so he could keep reading them without relying on the library at school to have copies.

"Harry!" A particularly thick text on the history of the Potter family slammed into the side of his head, staggering him, as his mother's voice broke his concentration. Looking over at the doorway, Harry found his mother standing with her hands on her hips, reminding him a great deal of Molly Weasley. "With who your father is, I would think you'd be familiar with the phrase 'Decree for the Reasonable Restriction of Underage Sorcery'. Do you want to get a warning before you even go to school?"

Well at least she'd caught him using Þrúðr's wand, rather than doing it all wandlessly. That'd be a bloody nightmare to explain. "Mum? Have you ever asked Dad how the Ministry monitors children?" Lily shook her head slowly and Harry gave a grim smile; he'd been pissed as all hell at the example of institutional discrimination when he'd found out. "I saw it when I was paging through Ten Things You Don't Know About Your Ministry, which is why I had you buy a copy. The Ministry has no way to track the use of any one wand, so they point a sensor at the home of each muggleborn who sends an acceptance letter to Hogwarts. They can't do that for houses with even one magical parent, because then if you used a spell, I'd get a letter. So..."

Lily's eyes went wide before narrowing in anger. "So purebloods and half-bloods get to practice magic all they like, while muggleborn students are forced to only do theoretical work every summer?" Harry nodded. "That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard! I'm going to go write a letter to the Daily Prophet and tell the whole world about this injustice!"

With that, she dropped the trunk she'd been dragging on the floor just outside his door and stomped off down the hall, muttering things under her breath that children were definitely not supposed to learn from their parents. Operation: Distract Mother From Advanced Silent Magic was a success. Harry grinned and made a pulling motion with his wand, dragging the trunk into his room before flicking to close the door. The new wand felt so much like an extension of himself, he didn't even want to use his wandless magic anymore. Idly, he wondered what would happen if he let the other wand... which he assumed was Thor's long lost wand... bond to him the same way Þrúðr's had.

Nah, he didn't need a skylight in his room.

Soon enough, Harry had his new trunk sorted and packed. The golden flower and 'Lily' in cursive script had been removed; he loved his mother dearly but didn't need it to be THAT obvious a momma's boy. Instead, the lid of the trunk now bore his own name with a warhammer and an axe bookending it. Since his mother was still

down the hall muttering, Harry knew he had some time before he'd have to go down to help cook dinner, and so he decided to take a moment and map out who in his year he was going to talk to when he got to Hogwarts. After all, he now knew who these eleven year-olds would grow into as adults. Why not use that information to make slightly more informed decisions than he had the first time around, like he had with Su?

Assuming he ended up in Gryffindor... his male housemates didn't look too promising. Seamus and Dean were first and foremost loyal to their respective families, then each other. They were tight like he and Ron had been tight, and he knew he'd be the fifth leg on a kneazle if he tried to be good friends with them. Neville was right out, and after the final months of his time in his original universe, he wasn't sure he could tolerate Ron's presence for any extended period of time without pummeling him for things that this Ron had yet to do.

Hmm. Maybe he ought to look into being sorted into Ravenclaw or something.

The girls were likewise utterly uninspiring. Pārvatī, Lavender, and Hermione. Hermione, definitely. If he could grab her now, he could prevent her from becoming the Ron-shagging harpy of the other dimension and keep at least the more useful of his two original friends. The other two, definitely not. Especially given how downright unpleasant this Pārvatī seemed compared to the version he'd known. Maybe he could talk to Hermione on the train and convince her to pursue placement in Ravenclaw, and they could go there together? He would have an easier time of things there, where studying and extracurricular spellwork were the exception rather than the norm, and she would enjoy the intellectual stimulation of housemates who preferred reading to partying.

If he did end up in Ravenclaw, there were at least two decent prospects among those he'd share a dorm with. Terry Boot had been a great help in the war against Voldemort. Same with Anthony Goldstein. Kevin Entwhistle and Joseph Roberts, he hadn't really gotten a chance to know. Michael Corner... definitely not.

The number of prospects was even higher among the girls and, given he was hoping to retain his friendship with the brightest witch of their generation and be sorted to the same place as her, the Ravenclaw girls were his most likely source of friends in this new world. Mandy Brocklehurst and Lisa Turpin had been members of the DA with moderate but not particularly noteworthy power, but Padma Patil had been both decently powerful and extremely bright. And Li Su... he'd need to send Hedwig off a little later with a letter for her. But she'd seemed receptive enough to his overtures of friendship.

When it came to the house of Helga Hufflepuff, it was again slim pickings among the boys while the girls were more promising. Stephen Cornfoot, Wayne Hopkins, Ernie Macmillan, and Zacharias Smith... none were brave enough to stand by him when Voldemort came knocking and were surprisingly unloyal for members of a house that prized that quality. Justin Finch-Fletchley was the only decent one of the lot, but with his muggleborn heritage... Hermione was his muggleborn. He didn't need another close friend who people would discriminate against based on who their parents were.

The Hufflepuff girls, though... good girls who were good-looking. Hannah Abbot had been part of the DA and gone on to date Neville; they'd been engaged when Harry left his world. He wouldn't mind having her at his back, especially given the vicious curses he'd seen her use on people who insulted Neville. Susan Bones had also been a bright young woman, soaking up his DA lessons like a sponge. What else would one expect from the niece of Amelia Bones, though? The fact that she WAS the niece of the DMLE head was tempting in and of itself, he had to admit. Nothing like friends with parents in high places.

Wait. No, that would be wrong. She was pretty and talented, like Su. That was a much better reason to be her friend.

Right?

Megan Jones, Niamh Murphy, and Sally-Anne Perks were all cute, decent students, and members of the DA. Any one of them could provide him with a decent friend and ally in Hufflepuff if Hannah or Susan didn't pan out.

As for the males of Slytherin... Harry wrote down each name and then slashed a line through it. No chance in hell. Zabini was the only halfway decent one in the house, and that just meant he believed himself superior and wanted muggles dead but didn't want to get his own hands dirty and therefore didn't go out of his way to torment the muggleborn and half-blood students. And with that as the most decent of them, Harry just considered the entire quintet a loss.

Green and silver's girls, on the other hand, weren't as simple. Pansy Parkinson and Millicent Bulstrode were part of Malfoy's crowd. Out of the other three, though, Tracey Davis and Lilith O'Mochain were neutral (both when it came to the war itself and Malfoy's antics), and he and Daphne had forged a bond in seventh year. Granted it was based on him saving her from a Death Eater attack in which she'd lost both parents and seen her younger sister come within moments of being raped... which meant he probably wouldn't be able to count on connecting with her here. Oh well. He'd mark her down as a maybe.

Hermione, Su, and maybe a Hufflepuff or Daphne. They'd form a nice core of friends for now, and then he could look to Ginny and Luna again the following year to expand to an even six, just like his inner circle last time around. And if none of the Hufflepuffs or other girls panned out, he could always recruit Lara Ramsay sooner and turn her into their sixth member, which would give him the set of eyes in Hufflepuff he wanted as well as giving Ginny and Luna a yearmate and friend with whom to go with when they divided into two trios instead of one big group.

Footsteps coming back down the hall warned Harry it was time to finish up and he tucked his journal away between two other books before closing the lid on his trunk. A moment after he managed to throw himself onto the bed, lying there casually with a book, his mother burst into the room with a thick roll of parchment. "Alright, done. Want to come help me cook dinner after I send this off?"

Harry pretended to ponder that for a moment before grinning. "I suppose. But only if I can use my wand. And I bet you a galleon that Dad won't notice until I'm hovering the food onto the table."

After pondering that for a moment, his mother grinned. Maybe she was feeling rebellious because she disagreed with the Ministry's policies about underage magic now that she knew about them... or maybe she just wanted him to do more work. Harry wasn't sure. "Deal. And you're on."

Harry ended up winning a galleon that night.

"Harry? Not that I mind spending time with you, but do you want to tell me why we're walking through the woods in the middle of the night?"

Harry grinned and looked back at his mother, leading the way as he used a muggle flashlight he'd found in a kitchen drawer in lieu of a *lumos* spell to light the way. "It's a secret?" Lily narrowed her eyes at his flippant response. "Or not. Remember what happened when I got my wand?"

Snorting, Lily gestured upward. "Bolt of lightning. Up, then down. Kind of hard to forget, sweetie. Why?"

"When I touched the wand for the first time, I... saw things. I think it was the original *Prúðr*. With the axe, she could fly and do all kinds of things." Harry shrugged and gestured around at the clearing they'd arrived in, the flashlight casting odd shadows as he whipped it back and forth. "I just figured it'd be better to try it here than to have you get a *floo* call from my head of house telling you I'd blown up my dorm or something."

"...you might have a point there. And Lord knows I've patched your father up enough times when he's come home hurt because he's too stubborn to go to St. Mungo's." Lily sighed but crossed her arms over her chest. "Fine, but if you manage to light part of the Potter ancestral property on fire, you get to explain this to your father. I'm apparating back to the house and pretending I was in the library the entire time."

Whipping out his new wand, Harry smirked as it shifted back into the axe it had become in Ollivander's. "Why Mum, that's positively

Slytherin sounding of you." Lily let out an indignant shriek at that and Harry cackled, dodging backwards as his mother lunged at him. Grabbing the axe handle with both hands, Harry lifted it above his head and concentrated on what he'd seen in the memories not his own.

His evasive tactics took him toward a log and Harry jumped atop it before flexing his legs and pushing off. He soared upward... but then gravity seemingly fell asleep on the job, and he continued upward in a straight line. "Woah!"

"Harry!" Down below his mother was wringing her hands nervously as she stared up at him with wide eyes. "Okay, don't panic, sweetie. I'll go get your father and a broom, and he'll come up there and..."

Shaking his head, Harry experimentally let go of the axe with one hand and spread his arms. He stayed suspended in midair, gaining and losing a tiny bit of height with each breath. "Wait. I think I've got this." Bending forward, he did a slow summersault in midair before straightening up again and laughing. Why had he never thought to bond with Thor's wand in his home universe? He loved flying with a broom, and this was even better. He'd had the wand for months before the final battle; broomless flying would have been a great way to blow off steam. "This is officially bloody AWESOME!"

"HARRY JAMES POTTER! Language!"

Harry winced. He'd defeated Voldemort, traversed time and space, become the owner of a wand that would let him call lightning and fly... but he still wasn't allowed to swear. How pathetic was that? "Yes, Mum."

At the Potter house, the last weeks of summer passed by in a blur for Harry. When they'd visited the family vault to retrieve money for shopping, he'd seen several new magical artifacts but trips to the library failed to produce information about them. After exhausting all potential reference materials, he made a mental note to ask his parents about them when he came home from Hogwarts for Christmas break. After all, once he'd been away from the house for a bit, he could then claim to have seen an heirloom ring or necklace on

one of his housemates and therefore be curious about something he'd seen in their own vault...

On the last few days before August 31, Harry tried to make a point to spend some time with his siblings, but it was hard. Jasmine and Rose were almost his age but they had very few interests in common with him, so while he got along with them and cohabitated peacefully, he couldn't really spend much time with them without either he or they getting hideously bored. So instead, he and Su had kept Hedwig and her spotted owlet Maau Tau Jing busy flying back and forth, exchanging short letters with little information of significance to them but establishing a friendly rapport. He now knew about some of the basic cuisine and culture of Hong Kong. She now knew something about what life was like when you had siblings and lived in a house in what was close to the middle of nowhere. Nothing earth shattering, but that could wait until they were face-to-face at Hogwarts again.

But the last day of summer arrived far sooner than Harry expected, and suddenly he found himself preparing one last breakfast for the family before passing through the floo to Platform 9¾ in London. Since it was just him going off to school, they ignored the muggle luggage carts and Harry took his trunk's handle in one hand and Hedwig's cage in the other, moving towards the all too familiar train waiting to take him to Hogwarts.

While there weren't many families on the platform yet, there was one large gathering that caught Harry's attention immediately: a group of seven redheads clustered around a stack of trunks and cages near the train. The Weasleys. He did a quick scan and realized why the headcount was one higher than he'd expected: Arthur Weasley was there with his family this time around. Hmm. That was odd... but ultimately of no consequence. And it turned out it gave him an excuse to get close to the family. "Arthur!"

The patriarch of the Weasley clan looked around before spotting them and waving. "James!"

The two families moved towards each other and the two men began discussing Ministry business, leaving Lily and Molly to roll their eyes

in dismay at their respective husbands before launching into a conversation of their own. That left the two groups of children separate; the Weasleys were busy interacting with each other and so the Potter twins were just left looking on in horrified awe at the insanity as Percy tried to keep Fred and George from tormenting Ron.

It took Harry a moment to spot the one Weasley he was actually looking for but eventually he managed to move to a spot where he could watch Ginny without being too conspicuous. She was clutching at her mother's hand, looking around with wide eyes at King's Cross and the people who were arriving in small groups for the trip to Hogwarts. But since she was trapped by her mother's grip and he had nowhere to be at the moment, he decided to take advantage of the situation and just drink her presence in.

What brought him up short was that in person, he could see why he'd mistaken his mother for an adult Ginny. There were definite similarities. Ginny had a few more freckles and brown eyes instead of his mother's green, but they had similar bone structure. Both were opinionated and not afraid to share it, powerful, and intelligent. It was hard to compare their intelligence directly, seeing as how his mother was in her thirties here and Ginny had died at sixteen, but his mother seemed smarter while Ginny balanced academics with athletics. Still, it wasn't a major enough difference to overshadow the similarities.

That made Harry a bit uneasy, but he pushed it down. So what if Ginny and Lily were similar? He idolized his mother now that he actually had one to get to know. It was inevitable that he would want the woman in his life to measure up to the high standards that Lily set in his mind. Maybe the original Lily had rubbed off enough that his subconscious had done likewise in his original universe.

Then Jasmine gravitated over to his side so she could pet Hedwig for a few more minutes before Harry loaded her on to the train, and Harry's eyes widened. After looking back and forth between Jasmine and Ginny a few times, his jaw dropped. If Ginny and Lily looked similar, Ginny and Jasmine could be half-sisters. Apart from their eyes and the number of freckles each girl had, they were practically identical.

Oh...

Sweet...

Merlin.

Okay, he could accept that Ginny and his mother were similar and it was okay because he wanted a woman as great as his mother was. Bad case of Oedipus Hex, maybe, but doable. But how could he rationalize wanting to be with a girl who resembled his sisters? The twins were wearing matching outfits that day, and Harry's mind provided an image of Ginny as their triplet in an identical outfit. Gahh! No! Bad brain!

Even as Harry tried to justify this new, particularly troublesome development to his brain and convince it that it wouldn't be some creepy, pseudo-incestuous disaster to be with this version of Ginny, her mouth opened. Harry tensed, hoping she was going to finally notice him and say hello. Instead, the redhead merely tugged on her mother's hand. "Mum? Where's Neville Longbottom? I want to meet the Boy-Who-Lived!"

Oh, right. At this age, Ginny was still obsessed with the mystique of the Boy-Who-Lived, and made her mother read the story to her each night. Why would she care about some black-haired stranger? Especially since she was ten and probably still thought boys had cooties except for the ever-so-wonderful Neville Longbottom? Merlin, he was stupid. Well bugger this, then. If Ginny wasn't going to notice him (and now he wasn't even sure he wanted her to), why was he wasting time standing around on the platform when he could be settling comfortably into a compartment before they all filled up and he was forced to share one with Ron or Malfoy?

Grabbing his trunk and Hedwig's cage, Harry said his final goodbyes to his family before boarding the train, looking up and down the corridor before setting off in a random direction in search of an empty compartment. After picking one at random, he hoisted Hedwig's cage into the overhead rack and then dug through his trunk, selecting two books to occupy him during the ride before using magic to float his

trunk up next to his owl. Opening one book as a bit of cover, Harry settled in to do a bit of people watching.

It was definitely odd to see so many familiar faces again, albeit in their younger forms. Fred and George were the first to pass by his compartment and Harry grinned, wondering what the two could possibly be discussing in low voices, heads close together. Nothing good, at any rate. Ron trailed behind them but thankfully didn't stop to try and sit with him this time. It made Harry wonder if him running into the Weasleys at King's Cross and then Ron sitting with him that first time aboard the Hogwarts Express was purely coincidence... or something more.

Hmmph. He was starting to turn into Mad-Eye, seeing conspiracies everywhere.

Then again, you weren't paranoid if they really were out to get you.

Another thing Harry noticed was how many people were talking about Neville bloody Longbottom, nattering on endlessly about their precious Boy-Who-Lived. Had it been that bad when he was on the train? He didn't remember it being quite as prevalent, but he'd shut himself up inside a compartment early in the journey and not emerged until they arrived at Hogwarts. It certainly was annoying. The kid had bounced a Killing Curse off his fat, snobby head. It's not like he'd led a great army in battle against a dark wizard or something.

A girl with curly brown hair walked past, and Harry almost thought it was Hermione until she looked back to talk to someone and he realized the face was completely wrong. But she still had the basic trim-free black robes of an incoming first year. That was interesting development he'd never taken into consideration. This universe had students in it that he wouldn't be familiar with. Harry thought of the list sitting in his journal. Would it still be useful or had he wasted his time? He'd assumed, foolishly, that only Neville would be different in this place. And it'd turned out Pārvatī was a little different too, but nothing too major. Who knew what other changes could have been wrought over the last ten years by parents making slightly different choices when it came to raising their children?

After all, at least one more was coming to Hogwarts. An odd mental image came to him and he chuckled. Maybe Hermione's parents had encouraged her to play sports instead of obsessing over school, and she and Dean Thomas would spend most nights in the common room arguing over football. Maybe Ron, the backstabbing bastard that he was, would end up in Slytherin. Wouldn't that be perfect? First Weasley in generations not in the house of lions.

Shaking his head, Harry slouched down in his seat and put his legs up on the opposite bench, focusing his attention on the book in front of him. What ifs were great, but ultimately useless. Until he arrived at school and saw the way things unfolded, guessing would accomplish nothing more than wasting his time. Time he could be using to study. And so he put his curiosities out of mind, found the spot where he'd left off, and went back to reading.

Joe's Note: Cram is a real anglicized surname, stemming from the German name 'Kram'. Much as Hermione's ancestors were farmers, taking up the name 'Granger' when surnames became popular, we know from Cordelia's last name that somewhere up the family tree, her family members were tradesmen in Germany.

An hour or so into the journey, Harry was disturbed as someone wrenched his compartment door open and stomped inside, slamming it shut and throwing themselves down across from him with a huff. After a moment, in which the other person made no move to initiate conversation, Harry marked his spot in his book and closed it, laying it on his lap. Who he found sitting across from him surprised him greatly.

It was Hermione, and yet she wasn't the Hermione he had known back in his first year and had expected to meet again. This Hermione was... well, brawny. Not on the level of Millicent "crossbred with a troll" Bulstrode, but in only a muggle t-shirt and jeans, it was very easy to spot that her level of physical fitness rivaled or perhaps even exceeded his own, and he was no slouch when it came to taking care of his body. Her hair was merely wavy instead of the frizzy mess he was used to, pulled back into a simple ponytail to keep it out of the way. And she was giving him a fierce glare, a look she hadn't perfected until after some of her adventures with him and Ron. "Take a photograph, it bloody well lasts longer. Oh wait, you probably don't know what a photo is. Snobby magical wankers."

Harry's jaw dropped. Hermione swearing? Leaning over, he looked out the window and peered up at the sky. Well, there was no rain of hellfire and brimstone yet. Huh. The other universe's Ron owed him a galleon. Turning back to Hermione, he offered her a smile. "Something tells me that you get along with the purebloods about as well as I do."

"All I did was overhear some of them talking about quidditch and ask if I could come in. I think the game sounds fascinating, and it's not like anything I've ever seen in the, err, muggle world. They figured out I was a muggleborn pretty quick and things went downhill." Hermione scowled and looked down, flexing the fingers on her right hand. They

seemed a bit scraped and red, which made Harry curious. She realized what he was staring at and raised her hand proudly. "Some dumb sod named Longbottom called me a 'mudblood' to my face. Hope you lot know a way to get his teeth back into his mouth. And really, Longbottom? Most English surnames come from your ancestors' occupation. My family used to be farmers; that's where the last name Granger comes from. What the hell kind of bizarre family does he come from?"

He couldn't help it anymore; Harry leaned his head back and laughed loudly. "A magical one. And a very vain one at that. Can't believe you punched the Boy-Who-Lived, though, that's priceless. Wish I'd been there to see that." Hermione gave him a curious look. "Oh, you don't know? Neville's a celebrity here in the magical world. His parents and mine used to be friends until he got famous for basically doing nothing, and his parents developed huge egos to match their son's."

Hermione's jaw dropped and Harry noticed she lacked the oversized front teeth of her other world counterpart. "I punched a celebrity? Huh. Well, he deserved it and I'll punch anyone who says otherwise." Wow, this Hermione was a violent one. Did that mean there was a Ron somewhere on the train with his nose buried in a book? "So, you're not a pureblood I take it?"

"Nope. Harry Potter, half-blood extraordinaire at your service. My father is a pureblood and my mother is a muggleborn like you. So yes, I know what a photograph is. And electricity, movies, and cars, for that matter. Haven't been many places with electricity, gone to the cinema, or ridden in a car, mind you, but I know what they are. And you would be... someone Granger. Do you have a first name, Miss Granger, or shall we just do the Madonna thing and call you 'Granger'?"

Hermione rolled her eyes and offered Harry a two-fingered salute. "Hermione. Hermione Granger. So do you know anything about sports? Quidditch or muggle ones? The other kids don't seem to realize that people play games other than quidditch, especially in the muggle world."

Shaking his head, Harry decided to go with the truth since he DID have patchwork knowledge of the muggle world but not enough to convincingly fake an interest in something Hermione liked. The girl could be bloody scary sometimes, and if her focus was on athletics instead of academics in this world, she could probably name every player in the Premier League or something. "No, I grew up in a town called Godric's Hollow. Mixed village and I know muggles, but other than some pick-up football games, the only sport I've really been exposed to is quidditch. You?"

After a moment, Hermione reached down and rolled up one leg of her jeans to show off a large, puckered scar on her shin. "I play field hockey. Goalkeeper. Sometimes, I go without pads because then I can toss my helmet at the coach and move up past half field with my teammates to try and score. Earned myself a compound fracture last month, which actually worked out well because I was supposed to do a presentation at the Hampshire County Science Fair on the same day as one of my games, and the injury cleared up my schedule. When Professor McGonagall came to speak with my parents, I was in a cast and had stitches and the works. She brought Madam Pomfrey over and they fixed me up in minutes. I've must say, the bigotry is a pisser but you can't hate a world that can put you back on the playing field in a day instead of months."

Merlin, Godric, and Salazar. Hermione played FIELD HOCKEY? Harry had seen one of the local school teams practicing during the summer between his fourth and fifth years. It was a rough sport. He eyed this new version of his former best friend. One important thing he had picked upon, though, was that she was still an academically gifted student even though she enjoyed sports too. How interesting. He had a feeling that he would never find himself bored if he stuck around her. Harry also realized something very important: he didn't have to hide himself around her. She didn't know he wasn't supposed to be good at or interested in quidditch. Mind made up, Harry leaned forward and grinned. "Yeah, magic can be bloody brilliant sometimes. Alright, what did you want to know about quidditch? I'm no Viktor Krum, but I know my share."

"First of all... did I read Quidditch Through the Ages right? Have the Chudley Cannons really not had a winning season in over a century?"

"Close. They've had winning seasons, just not won the League Cup."

"Still. That's bloody pathetic."

"Pretty much, yeah."

When the train finally rolled in to the station near Hogsmeade, Harry and Hermione disembarked and started to make their way towards Hagrid. It was odd for Harry to be surrounded by miniature versions of all the people he was used to, and some of them weren't at all like what he was used to.

Neville was a prime example. No matter how hard Harry looked, not a single trace of either the shy, plump boy from first year or the confident young man of their seventh remained. This Neville was a chubby, dark-haired Draco Malfoy, except his claim to fame was a scar on his head instead of familial riches and a well-positioned father.

There were at least three new faces this time around, and one missing one. Harry was pretty sure the latter was linked to one of the former, though. Given he was one of only two dark-skinned students, Blaise Zabini was noticeable in his absence among the mostly white group of incoming students. There was, however, a dark-skinned female among those waiting to be sorted. There was an obvious connection to be made there, but Harry didn't want to make assumptions. He'd find out who she was soon enough.

One of the others was the thin, curly brown-haired girl he'd initially mistaken for Hermione. The other was quite bizarre; a pale-skinned brunette with blue streaks in her hair who surveyed the grounds with an icy blue stare. Who were they? What were they like? Harry didn't know, but figured they should be near the top of his list since while he MIGHT know something about the rest of the students in his year, he definitely knew nothing about the three girls.

"Firs' years! Firs' years over here!" Harry tugged Hermione's sleeve, leading her over to where Hagrid was waiting for them. It was a bit odd not to get a personal greeting from the friendly half-giant, but

Harry reminded himself that they'd never met before. In this universe, Hagrid hadn't flown him from Godric's Hollow to Little Whinging, and certainly hadn't delivered his Hogwarts letter and taken him to Diagon Alley for the first time. "C'mon, follow me... any more firs' years? Mind yer step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

The forty students and Hagrid followed a narrow path away from the train platform as the older students moved toward the thestral-drawn carriages, stumbling through the woods towards the lake. "Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec, jus' round this bend here." There were gasps and appreciative noises as Hagrid led them out onto a narrow beach that separated the woods from the large lake, gesturing with his umbrella to the row of boats sitting on the shore. "No more'n four to a boat!"

With a chorus of low murmurs, the students began splitting up into groups for the boats. Harry and Hermione looked at each other before heading towards the boat on the end; though there'd been no juvenile 'will you be my friend' moment, it was pretty much an unspoken assumption that they were sticking together from now on. The boat shifted and Harry looked back to see who had hopped in. "Hey there. Nice of you to remember I exist."

Rolling her eyes, Su settled in and leaned forward so she didn't have to shout to be heard over the loudly-chattering first years. "Oh hush. You looked perfectly happy with who you were talking to on the train and I'd already found some people to sit with. Why disturb you when I knew I'd see you when we got off the train?" She had a point, Harry had to admit. "But, now that I'm here... introduce me to your new friend, Harry."

"Oh. Right." Harry looked back and forth between Su and Hermione, each of whom seemed to be sizing up the other with an eerie intensity. "Hermione, this is Li Su. Su, this is Hermione Granger. So, Su, find anything of interest in yesterday's last minute trip to Flourish and Blott's?"

Su nodded. "Actually, I found this brilliant book called Hogwarts: A History."

Groaning as Hermione's eyes lit up, Harry took advantage of the fact they were still run aground on the beach to switch seats with Su, putting her next to Hermione so the two could discuss the book without him being stuck in the middle. Harry looked around, watching as the other students grouped up into quartets and filled boats. One by one, the stragglers found seats until there was only a single student left on the beach... and one seat next to Harry. And as the figure approached his boat, the moonlight casting her features in sharp relief, Harry couldn't help but wonder if some deity up there was giving him a hand in recreating what would have been a most difficult friendship to forge. "Hi. Harry Potter."

After staring at him for a moment, the blonde-haired latecomer offered her hand. "Daphne Greengrass. You wouldn't be James Potter's son, would you?" Harry wasn't sure how she knew about his parents, but nodded; such a thing would be impossible to hide anyways. "My mother paid your father to take her out on a date in fifth year. It's what got my father to finally act on his feelings and make a move. So when you write home, tell him I said thanks for being the reason I exist."

How did one respond to that? "Err, sure. Glad to help, I guess." Harry looked at the other two girls in the boat but when they failed to follow his lead, he took it upon himself to facilitate introductions. "Daphne, front left is Li Su and to her right is Hermione Granger."

"Oh? The muggleborn who punched Longbottom in the mouth and knocked out four of his teeth?" Hermione nodded and sat up proudly. Daphne looked her over critically before offering a small smile. "Good job. Damn boy is insufferable."

Hermione and Harry grinned.

"The ceiling is bewitched to look like the sky outside. The enchantment was created by..."

"...Phineas Nigellus when he was headmaster and is considered one of the few positive parts of his tenure with the school..."

"...according to Hogwarts: A History." Su and Hermione looked at each other before grinning and Harry shook his head. Great. There were two of them now. Just what he needed. Thankfully Su would be going to Ravenclaw and Hermione was bound for Gryffindor. That way, no matter which house he got sent to, he'd only have to deal with one of them on a daily basis.

As Hermione grilled Su about the various things she'd learned while reading the aforementioned book, Harry looked over at Daphne and offered her a small grin. The smile he got in return was about as fake as the ones he'd seen Aunt Petunia offer the other women on Privet Drive when they came over for tea. Harry's smile faltered. Right. They weren't friends here and just because the universe had put Su and Hermione in easy reach didn't mean things would keep going his way. He turned his attention forward as Professor McGonagall brought out the small stool and the sorting hat, causing his peers to whisper. After a moment, the hat stirred and opened its mouth, bursting into song.

"Oh you may not think me pretty,
But don't judge on what you see,
I'll eat myself if you can find
A smarter hat than me.
You can keep your bowlers black,
Your top hats sleek and tall,
For I'm the Hogwarts sorting hat
And I can cap them all.
There's nothing hidden in your head
The sorting hat can't see,
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve, and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,

if you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folks use any means
To achieve their ends.

So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a thinking cap!"

The hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song, and Harry felt at least a small measure of relief. He knew from the past that the sorting hat could react to the changing circumstances of the magical world, and had half expected something about a dimensional traveler or the descendent of Thor to pop up in the song. His secret was still safe, it appeared. Stepping forward, McGonagall called up Hannah Abbot and the hat went onto her head. "HUFFLEPUFF!"

"Bones, Susan!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

The next few went according to the way Harry remembered: Terry Boot into Ravenclaw, followed by Mandy Brocklehurst, Lavender Brown in Gryffindor, and Millicent Bulstrode in Slytherin. Then came one of the girls Harry didn't recognize. "Burkle, Winifred!"

While she lacked Malfoy's arrogant swagger, 'Winifred' possessed what Harry could only describe as a command presence. She wasn't arrogant about it, she simply WAS better than everyone else. Or at least that's the way she acted, Harry wasn't sure whether or not she could back it up; the wizarding world had its share of frauds and pretenders. But he was definitely going to keep an eye on her, no matter where she ended up.

As soon as the hat touched Winifred's head, it opened its mouth... and screamed. And screamed. And screamed. McGonagall

exchanged nervous looks with Dumbledore, who rose from his chair and was halfway around the head table to come investigate when the girl narrowed her eyes and the hat abruptly went silent. There was a long moment where Harry could have heard a wand drop, then the hat spoke. "S-S-S-S-SLYTHERIN!"

Hmm. Alright, he'd be keeping an eye but not that close of one. Unless he... no, it wasn't worth spending seven years in the dungeons just to keep an eye on the girl.

From there, the sorting continued on normally, although the Slytherins were looking at their newest member nervously and nobody seemed keen on sitting next to her. Hermione was once again a Gryffindor, which didn't surprise him after meeting this newer, feistier version. And evidently someone up there either liked or hated him, because Daphne soon followed her over to the Gryffindor table, sitting next to the muggleborn witch.

"Li, Su."

"GRYFFINDOR!"

Bugger. Harry shook his head as Su took up a position at Hermione's other side, the two whispering to each other and grinning. They'd be insufferable now.

Somehow, Neville still managed to get into Gryffindor, which was a surprise because Harry would have expected Slytherin with his personality. The next of the strangers to reach the hat was the girl with curly brown hair, who McGonagall announced as 'Maximoff, Wanda'. She went to Gryffindor, grabbing a spot on Su's other side and bouncing energetically on the bench. And oddly enough, while Padma went on to Ravenclaw like in his home universe, Pārvaṭī was declared a Slytherin after almost five minutes under the sorting hat.

"Perks, Sally-Anne."

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

"Potter, Harry."

After waiting a moment, Harry shook his head and remembered that nobody would be pointing and whispering here. He was just Harry, not the Boy-Who-Lived. Moving up to sit on the chair, Harry felt the hat touch his head and waited. After a moment, he felt it shift but what came out wasn't what he was expecting. "Would you please lower your occlumency shields?"

Whispers broke out around the hall and Harry resisted the urge to curse. An eleven year-old with mental shields, much less ones thick enough that the sorting hat couldn't penetrate? Oh yes, he was going to blend in now. Sighing, Harry lowered the shields and reached out to the hat with his mind. 'Can you please not sort me into Slytherin? Any other house would be fine, even Hufflepuff. Just not Slytherin. If I end up in that house, I'll withdraw from Hogwarts and...'

The hat's response pushed against Harry's mind with a volume that left his head spinning. 'Silence, you arrogant little whelp! I have half a mind to put you in Slytherin, just to see if you follow through on that threat. Or maybe I'll refuse to put you in a house and you can have the distinction of being the first refused student at Hogwarts in close to two centuries. I am called the sorting hat for a reason, Harry Potter: determining where to place you is my job. If you are meant to be a Slytherin, then it's where you'll end up. Now be quiet and let me get to work.' Harry's jaw dropped; the sorting hat could read his mind. Didn't it know how powerful he was? 'Oh? And here I thought that Voldemort was the one in your universe who believed 'there is no good or evil, only power and those too weak to seek it'. No, Potter, your power means nothing to me. The question is... what will you do with the power you have? That's what I need to determine... although your desire to make friends based on how useful they'll be when older is a distinctly Slytherin mindset.'

Harry's mind raced; this wasn't going anything at all like he'd anticipated. He absolutely could not be a Slytherin. Nobody would want him around, much less trust him to do something altruistic without selfish ambitions. 'If you can see my memories from the other universe, you should be able to answer that one for yourself, hat. I may be younger and a bit more jaded, but I'm still the same person.' Mostly. Okay, so maybe he was a bit more Slytherin, but he had to

scheme and lie to get by in this world. He wasn't a native and definitely wasn't a normal eleven year-old. It was a necessary evil, though, not something he enjoyed.

'I sincerely hope so. After seeing into Longbottom's mind, I can firmly say this world needs a person like you. Although you'd do well to think more and threaten less in the future. After all, you never know when you'll have to try and retreat back over the bridges you torched. And as much as I hate it, this society clings to truly foolish stereotypes. Now is not the time to try and force a change, especially when you will defy their beliefs and outshine the boy they try to hoist on high as their savior. You would never be accepted as a hero unless you came from...' The hat twitched again on Harry's head. "GRYFFINDOR!"

Whipping the hat off his head and putting it on the chair, Harry hurried over to sit next to Daphne. The blonde gave him an odd look and Harry realized the rest of the house was looking at him as well. Oh bugger. Had the hat said something incriminating aloud while the two had been communicating mentally? "What?"

Hermione leaned across Daphne and lowered her voice. "Harry, you were up there for nearly fifteen minutes. What were you and the hat talking about? And what's occlumency?"

"Merlin, Granger, give him a chance to answer one question before you harass him with another. Occlumency is a type of mind magic that you can use to protect yourself from outside attack. In this case, the sorting hat, but the most common attack is called legilimency." Two points to Gryffindor for the explanation, Miss Greengrass. Harry chanced a look over at the girls, finding both of them staring at him expectantly and Su peeking around Hermione, also hoping to hear an answer. "Don't think you're getting out of the other questions, though. I want to know what the hat said to you that took so long too."

Noticing the students had dwindled down to Ron and the unknown dark-skinned girl, Harry waved them off. Ron, quite predictably, went in to Gryffindor although he went straight down the table to get the spot closest to Neville instead of gravitating toward Harry. That was to be expected, Harry realized, seeing as how at this age Ron too

was obsessed with the celebrity of the Boy-Who-Lived rather than interested in who the person under the scar was.

"Zabini, Blaise!"

He'd suspected it... but wow. This was amusing in a strange sort of way. Harry watched the girl seat herself on the stool, taking a long moment to look her over when it was acceptable since everyone else was staring too. Yes, he could see the resemblance to the male Blaise he'd known. A bit in the cheekbones, the general shape of her lips (although hers were fuller than the original's had been)... obvious factors such as the skin tone and eye color. Evidently, though, gender wasn't the only thing different about this Blaise. After a minute or so of consideration, the sorting hat announced a decision. "RAVENCLAW!"

Thankfully, food appeared soon after and sating their hunger distracted the girls from their questions. Harry had no doubt the conversation would happen, but for now, he wanted the time to think. Both about what web of lies he'd spin for the girls he'd spend ten months a year for the next seven years with, and how he wanted to handle the problem that was the Philosopher's Stone.

Obviously, he couldn't simply accuse Quirrell of having Voldemort sticking out of the back of his head and let things go from there. Not only would it tip his hand as to his unnatural knowledge, but Harry would look like quite a fool if this was another Blaise situation and the universe was different. Maybe Snape was Voldemort's vessel. Maybe Quirrell would still do it but was nothing more than a willing servant. Maybe one of the other teachers had gotten possessed. The possibilities were endless.

Second year would be obvious and yet complicated: all he had to do was locate the diary horcrux... but who knew who would end up with it. If Malfoy was smarter in this dimension, he'd target a neutral family or even use one of his son's future housemates rather than drop it in the cauldron of a family who'd sent every member into Gryffindor for the last few centuries. That assumed Lucius was smarter here, though. So it could be very simple or very hard, and he wouldn't know until next fall. Joy.

After that came third year... would Pettigrew escape Azkaban like Sirius had? And if so, would he come after anyone in the castle? Not only would Longbottom be there (assuming he hadn't flunked out or died by then), but so would Harry, his younger sisters, and Sirius's daughter Cassie. If Peter held a grudge against his two former best friends, they'd all present good targets for revenge.

Fourth year... he knew what he had to do in his fourth year. Nobody would die in the second war if there was no second war. He would either enter as the fourth champion again, find a way to make his way in as Hogwarts's real champion, or sneak into the maze and grab the cup first. But Voldemort would die in Little Hangleton that night, Harry was certain of that.

After dinner, desert, and Dumbledore's announcements (including the 'most painful death' bit about a certain corridor), Percy Weasley and a brown-haired girl with freckles, glasses, and a bright smile descended on them. "First years, follow us! My name is Percy Weasley and I shall be your fifth year prefect this year. Please, stay with us, the hallways can be very confusing and I don't want any of you getting lost on your first night."

"Oh, lighten up, Percy. It's not like they can lose sight of that bright red mop of yours." The girl's grin widened as most of the first years laughed, herding from behind to keep them moving after Percy as they ascended the moving stairs towards where Gryffindor Tower was. "My name is Cordelia Cram, and I'm your other fifth year prefect. Between the two of us, we can answer any question you have or solve almost any problem you need... but girls, I recommend coming to me if you have feminine issues unless you want to see a boy's face turn Gryffindor red."

After a lengthy hike and the requisite explanation of the portrait system and an introduction to the Fat Lady, the new Gryffindors were led into their common room and guided over to one corner full of couches and chairs. Why quickly became evident. "Right then. Just so you know, every year the prefects sit the first years down and we go around and introduce ourselves so we can start getting to know each other." Percy puffed up, rubbing the sleeve of his robe against

his prefect badge. "I'll go first, just to start things off. My name is Percy Weasley. I'm the third of seven children, and oldest of the four currently at Hogwarts. My brothers Fred and George are third years, and Ron is sitting among you. My sister Ginny will be attending next year. I hope to become Head Boy, then go on to work at the Ministry of Magic. Cordelia?"

Cordelia grinned and dropped onto the couch between Su and Daphne, leaning back and kicking her feet up on a nearby coffee table with her legs carefully crossed for modesty reasons. "I'm Cordelia Cram. Still, just like five minutes ago. Um... I have an older sister who's as dumb as a stump. Kept going out to party with the muggle boys who lived near us and got herself pregnant. Daddy ordered a marriage at wandpoint because no grandchild of his was going to be born out of wedlock. I think she's on her third or fourth pregnancy in that many years now, but I haven't heard from her in a while because we can't exactly send an owl to her when she lives in the middle of an all-muggle neighborhood without people getting suspicious. When I graduate, I want to move somewhere that doesn't have 'hog' in the name and... I don't know, do something."

From there, since the group was divided among gender lines with Harry and Hermione sitting together on a couch and forming the border between the two sexes, they got to hear about the utterly enthralling lives of Seamus, Ron, Dean, and Neville, including a particularly bad and overly dramatic account of how the latter supposedly survived the Killing Curse.

Then all eyes turned to Harry, and he sighed. Bugger.

Joe's Note: I'm playing fast and loose with the timeline here; Rowling claims the first year for Harry was in 1991, but never in any of her seven books managed to match a year to a calendar and had problems as far as technology existing too early. So when in Rome...

Nuked a good-sized scene here, which was basically the original author beating off about how many friends-with-benefits Harry had; basically amounting to every light side-affiliated female in his immediate age group. Oh, he dumped Cho but bent her over a few times, Fleur was his sex toy, yadda yadda yadda. Yeeeaah, let's not and say we did, hmm? Strangely enough, I don't feel like I've lost anything by removing either the scene or the idea of Harry being an utter manwhore. Anyone disagree?

"My name is Harry James Potter... and I'm an alcoholic."

"Harry Potter! That's not funny in the slightest!" Hermione huffed and gave him a surprisingly powerful push before crossing her arms over her chest. "Alcoholism is a serious problem that can destroy families and end lives, and isn't something to take lightly." The rest of the group save for Wanda and Dean looked clueless, marking the other students with muggle knowledge for him. They were the ones to watch, since he could know some but not too much about them due to his split heritage yet magical upbringing.

Wincing, Harry rubbed his arm. Bloody hell, that one would need a minor healing charm later. Oww. "So noted. As I was saying before I was so rudely assaulted, my name is Harry Potter. My favorite colors are black, gold, and green. My father is a pureblood and my mother is a muggleborn. They were the Head Boy and Head Girl back when they attended and were both in Gryffindor. Oh, and I like quidditch and reading." And I'm a dimensional traveler bonded to one of the wizarding world's most famous weapons, as well as in possession of a second such weapon. Harry debated dropping that bombshell just to watch the reactions, but resisted the urge. Praying people would move on and not bug him about his time under the sorting hat, he turned to his right. "Hermione?"

Hermione looked over at Neville, who was staring at her with wide eyes, likely remembering the abuse she'd heaped upon him on the train. After a moment, she scoffed and looked away, turning her attention to Cordelia. "My name is Hermione Granger and I'm a muggleborn. I'm looking forward to Transfiguration and Defense Against the Dark Arts because they seem like the most exciting disciplines of magic. I want to learn how to fly and play quidditch, and back home I was the goalkeeper for my school's field hockey team."

While that didn't seem to mean much to most of the group, Dean gave a start at that and so did Wanda. "Wow. You play field hockey? I always wanted to but my parents wouldn't let me because it's too rough. Oh, I'm Wanda Maximoff. Also muggleborn. I love the color red and when I grow up, I want to use magic to become a superhero!"

"Erm, Wanda? You do know that's not possible, right?" Cordelia leaned forward, patting Wanda on the hand. "I mean, I assume you want to help muggles, right?" Wanda nodded. "We have rules against using magic around them, even if you're an adult. You'd end up getting arrested for violating the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy and ever since You-Know-Who, they've been really touchy about that sort of thing."

Wanda opened her mouth, closed it, and sank back into her chair pouting. "Pooh."

After tuning out an abridged history of Lavender Brown, Harry devoted his attention to the former eagle and snake in lions' clothing. The pair looked at each other, each gesturing for the other to proceed, before Hermione leaned over and jabbed Su in the ribs with her wand, prodding the diminutive girl into speaking. "Eep. Alright then. My name is Li Su. For all you ignorant gweilos, that means my given name is Su and my family name is Li. Unless we're friends, I won't respond to Su, so you're better off calling me Li if you actually want me to answer you. I was born in Hong Kong and am one-eighth British, seven-eighths Chinese. My parents are the current owners of a very successful import business established by my ancestors several generations ago and when I graduate, I'm going to work for them."

There were nods and confused mutters as she finished, leaving Daphne as the lone holdout from their little sharing session. "Daphne Greengrass. Pureblood. I'm a member of the primary Greengrass line, not one of the outer branches. Looking for a husband over the next seven years. Going to be a housewife. Stop staring at me before I hex you all."

"Part of the primary line and looking for a husband, huh?" Neville grinned and leaned forward in his seat. "Well, I'll have you know that..."

Daphne narrowed her eyes, jabbing her wand forward. "Stupefy!" A jet of red light caught Neville right in the face, throwing him back in his chair so hard it tipped over, spilling him onto the floor. While not particularly impressive in the grand scheme of things, the fact that Daphne could perform that spell so well as a first year was noteworthy. Everyone looked at Daphne in disbelief, who glared at Neville's fallen form as she tucked her wand away. "Over the next seven years. I'm eleven right now, you filthy little pervert. Gross." She looked around at her peers. "Anyone else to try their luck?"

Checking the old pocket watch he'd swiped from his father before leaving the house, Harry shook his head. "I'll have to take you up on that another time, Daphne. It's getting late and I want to go check on my things." Hopping to his feet, he decided he felt a little playful and gave a bow to the first year girls. "Ladies." Harry reached out, grabbing Cordelia's hand so he could plant a kiss on the back. "Miss Cram. Until tomorrow."

Harry grinned as he walked away, feeling eyes on his back and hearing whispering involving his name for the first time since he'd arrived in this world. And for the first time in his life, it was for something he actually did instead of the fact that his parents died to save him. It was a refreshing feeling. The noise fell off as he entered the first year dorm, although it quickly returned as the other four boys in his year piled in after him, Neville being carried by the other three. Rolling his eyes, Harry drew his wand and surreptitiously revived Neville. The boy thrashed, causing the others to drop him, and looked around in surprise. "Whah? Huh?"

"Daphne hexed you for being a twit." Harry grinned and grabbed his trunk from the stack in the middle of the room, pondering for a moment before grabbing the same bed as in his old universe. Perfect location: neither too close nor too far from the fire, and not next to the door so he could sleep in on weekends while his roommates got up and went about their day. "Was pretty funny, if you ask me. Right in the face at point blank range."

Growling, Neville struggled to his feet and pulled out his wand. "This, and that mudblood Granger back on the train. Do you know they had to have Madam Pomfrey apparate onto the train an hour out so she could put my teeth back in?" Rolling up his sleeves, he stomped toward the door. "I don't care if they are girls. Nobody treats Neville Longbottom like that and gets away with it!"

Harry narrowed his eyes. Even if he didn't have a soft spot where Hermione's younger self was concerned (and Daphne to a lesser degree), not only did he hate that word mudblood but violence against women was utterly unacceptable in his book. Except in the case of Bellatrix Lestrange, whose face he'd pulverized with the hammer form of his secondary wand. But honestly, did that beast really count as a woman? "I don't think so, Longbottom. Now put your wand away before you get hurt. Again."

"And who do you think's going to hurt me? You?" Neville laughed and tapped his wand against his forehead. "I'm the Boy-Who-Lived. You're just the son of a mudblood and a whiny pureblood auror, according to my father. I got an exception from the Minister himself to begin learning magic last year. You don't stand a chance against... ARGH!"

After wandlessly calling up silencing charms around the room to mask what he was about to do from the prefects, Harry then unleashed the same spell he'd used on Ollivander. Thunder roared in the enclosed space of their dorm as a tendril of blue lightning connected his wand tip to Neville, making the boy thrash wildly before collapsing to the floor as Harry held him under for the standard five seconds before releasing it. "I really don't like that word, Longbottom."

Neville glared up at him with hate-filled eyes, struggling to retake command of his limbs as he lay on the floor. "Oww. There's only one spell that causes that kind of pain and... wait. You just used an Unforgivable on me? How bloody stupid are you? When my father finds out, you're going to end up in Azkaban so fast..."

Crouching down, Harry grinned. "I would think someone with an auror captain for a father would actually know what the Unforgivables are, Longbottom. That was a Norse spell to create electricity. It's like what they use to power the wizarding wireless sets. Nothing illegal in the least." That was a horrible lie; his Hermione-inspired low power lightning bursts were closer in effect to the Cruciatus than he was strictly comfortable with. But he definitely wasn't going to spill the secret of his wands and powers over something this stupid. "While your father fills your head with hot air and stories, mine tells me about his actual work. You see, there's not much difference between lightning, muggle electricity, and what makes our bodies work. The muggles figured that out and made a weapon for their bobbies... their aurors, if you will... that keeps your body from working right and makes you collapse like a puppet with no strings. A bit like you just did. So no, no Unforgivables. Just a little jolt." Patting Neville on the head, he rose and walked over toward his bed. "Besides, Hermione already knocked out your teeth and Daphne stunned you. Do you really want to pick a fight with either of them a second time? Losing to a girl once is embarrassing enough for the Boy-Who-Lived, twice would just make you look like a total incompetent."

Casting a few protective charms on his trunk while the others were busy fawning over Neville, Harry threw himself onto the bed and stared up at the ceiling. Hopefully tasers were in use already in the muggle world or he'd have some explaining to do if he used that bit around Hermione. Hell, he hoped he never had to use the spell around her period. His explanation to Neville had been only a small part of the half hour lecture on taser technology that Hermione had given him after his encounter with such a device had sparked the inspiration to use his powers in such a way.

Reaching down, Harry absently rubbed a spot just below his ribcage. Oh yes, he knew first hand how effective the devices could be; as much as he didn't fault the bobbies for reacting to his sudden

appearance when they were already trying to fend off Death Eaters and shocking him, it had hurt like... hell, like the time he and Buckbeak had roughhoused a bit and he'd gotten kicked by the hippogriff.

The sorting hat had said that this world would need him... did that mean there wasn't a prophecy here and he was free and in the clear to kill Voldemort without having to worry about some arcane magic coming back to bite him on the ass? Or was there a prophecy that the hat wasn't aware of? It was a very smart hat, yes, but still just a hat and a hat that lived in Dumbledore's office. It was far from omniscient.

One thing was for certain, though, he certainly hadn't won many friends today by befriending the girls who'd assaulted the Boy-Who-Lived. Or assaulting the Boy-Who-Lived himself, come to think of it. Then again, he'd take Hermione over the entire rest of the school if it came down to that... although he had a feeling that Su and Daphne would still swing his way even if the rest of the house or even the entire rest of their year didn't.

Sitting up, Harry discovered the other four boys in his dorm all glaring at him and rolled his eyes. Merlin, the wizarding world was full of sheep. Crawling to the end of his bed, he retrieved a book from his trunk and moved back to sit against the headboard, taking up where he'd left off. Screw them all. He'd save this world, just like the last, and if society didn't like him... well, they could kiss his toned, dimension-hopping arse.

The next morning came all too soon for Harry's tastes, who had stayed up far later than was intelligent while reading his current book of choice. Alas, he had no desire to miss some or all of his classes on the first day and receive the associated punishments, so he forced himself to get up and collected clean clothes from his trunk before staggering toward the loo.

Inside, Harry found his peers in the middle of their showers and smirked at the none-too-friendly looks he received. Turning on the water, Harry flicked his wrist and watched their eyes widen as Þrúðr's wand slid up out of the bracer on his right forearm, allowing him to

tweak the temperature of the water to get it just perfect, as opposed to relying on the taps like they were. A cold burst to wake him up, a quick warm shower to get clean, and then he was ready to get his day started.

When he made it down to the common room, Hermione was already waiting for him with her satchel full of books at her feet, idly amusing herself by bouncing an orange ball against the head of a meter long stick. Harry eyed it curiously, wondering how hard Neville's head was and how it would fair against Hermione's field hockey stick if he was dumb enough to insult her when she had it out.

Or rather when, not if, he did it. Given how stupid the Boy-Who-Lived seemed to be in this universe, Harry regarded it as an inevitable event rather than a potential problem. Hopefully one he could manage to sell tickets to. George and Fred weren't the only ones who could profit off their peers.

Feeling a bit playful, Harry kept to the shadows and fired off a charm at Hermione, hitting the back of her head and creating Gryffindor red streaks in her chocolate brown mane. As he pondered a way to approach her and bring it up without immediately drawing suspicion to himself, Wanda descended from the girls' dorms and squealed. "Oh Hermione, that's brill! Did you get a one of the older students to do that to your hair or do you know the spell yourself?"

Hermione eyed Wanda for a moment, reaching up to pat her hair, before racing up the steps into her dorm. Harry knew the exact moment she stepped in front of a mirror, as it was accompanied by the loudest profanity he'd heard since that time two young men had come to the front door of Number Four asking Uncle Vernon to sign a petition in favor of the Civil Partnership Act. When Hermione descended the stairs again, she looked around wildly before her eyes landed on him. "YOU!"

"Me?" Harry held his hands up in surrender and put on his best innocent face, slowly backing away from her. "Now Hermione, just because I mentioned my father being a prankster while we were talking on the train doesn't mean I'm responsible for your hair spontaneously changing color."

Hermione continued to eye him suspiciously but thankfully Percy chose that moment to make his first appearance of the morning, and Hermione latched on to him in hopes of getting her hair fixed. After a simple finite failed, he tried a few diagnostic charms and frowned. "It's definitely a cosmetic charm of some kind, but this isn't my area of expertise. It looks like you'll need to find one of the older female prefects, since Cordelia is... unavoidably detained... this morning."

That caught Harry's attention; while he hadn't been at his most observant back in his first year, he was pretty sure he would have remembered a prefect turning up sick or injured on the first day of classes. "What happened to her?"

After a moment of contemplation, Percy sighed and leaned in towards Harry and Hermione. "Please keep this to yourselves, but Cordelia decided that Dumbledore's warning about the third floor corridor didn't apply to her because she was a prefect and paid a visit during her rounds last night. She's currently recovering in the hospital wing."

Huh. Evidently being 'dumb as a stump' ran in the family. Mental images of a girl savagely mauled by Fluffy popped into Harry's mind and he cringed. They likely wouldn't be seeing her for a while, even with Madam Pomfrey's talents, and for all the wizarding world's ability to heal the body's insides, their ability to remove scars seemed to be sorely lacking. If Fluffy had gotten a few bites in, Cordelia was going to come away from this bearing a resemblance to Remus. "Alright. Thanks, Percy. Let's go, Hermione. Breakfast! We can get our schedules for the year and see what classes we have today."

"And eat. I hope the food is like last night; that was incredible." Hermione rubbed her hands together, red streaks in her hair forgotten as she pondered the potential breakfast spread. "I told Su and Daphne we'd wait for them, though. But if they don't get down here in the next few minutes, we'll leave without them. I want to make friends and all, but nobody gets between me and my breakfast. Or my dinner. I'll tolerate lunch delays, but only if it's because of studying or sports."

Merlin, this Hermione was scary. Almost like what Harry would picture from a child of the Ron and Hermione of his old dimension, just

without the freckles. Seeing as how he was thinking of pulling at least Su, and hopefully Daphne as well, in to join him and Hermione as the new Gryffindor dream team, it was quite fortunate that they descended the stairs about a minute later, before Hermione could get too impatient and drag him off to eat.

"Nice hair, Hermione." Reaching up, Su tugged one of the red streaks and then laughed, dancing back out of the way as Hermione tried to slap at her hand. "You know, I liked that picture of you with the 'microbraids' that you showed us last night. Maybe we could braid the red streaks and put gold beads on the end? McGonagall might give you points for house pride."

Harry pondered that. Their head of house had an odd sense of humor. Maybe he should turn his own hair into red and gold spikes to see what she'd say? Mind busy trying to decide between fixing Hermione and changing his own hair, Harry didn't notice Daphne's approach until she elbowed him roughly in the ribs. "Don't even think about it, Potter." He raised an eyebrow and she held out her arm. "Whatever strange thoughts are going on inside your head. That's not the face of an innocent man. Now be a gentleman and escort me to breakfast."

Shaking his head, Harry held up his right arm to expose the wrist holster he wore. Right now, only Brúðr's wand was with him but he could simultaneously carry and use up to three at once with it. "Only if I can be on the right. Longbottom and I exchanged some words last night and... well, it's not paranoia if the chubby little prat really is out to get you."

"You do know how to win friends and influence people, don't you, Potter." Daphne sighed and lowered her left arm before offering her right. "I'm going to have to put a lot of work into you, aren't I?"

Harry raised an eyebrow as they passed through the portrait hole and began making their way down to the great hall. "Lot of work into me... huh? Why? Before what? Or something inquisitive along those lines."

Rolling her eyes, Daphne brought her free hand up to tap the necklace she was wearing, the massive emerald in a gold setting

standing out against her pale skin. "Never mind, Potter. I'll explain it to you in a few years, when you're old enough to understand."

The problem was, Harry was pretty sure he already understood. That was why he was confused. She'd stated the night before that her future plans involved meeting a man, marrying him, and being a housewife. Surely she wasn't implying that she was already planning to latch onto him and try to work out his rough spots... right? Even if she was just thinking in the long term, he found the very notion to be distinctly unsettling. Granted he was seventeen on the inside and had been engaged to be married at one point, but he was eleven on the outside now and she was just plain eleven. That made the situation horribly disturbing on so many levels.

Grabbing the end seats of the Gryffindor table, the quartet sat two to a side, with Harry and Hermione serving as a buffer between their companions and the rest of the table with Su beside Hermione and Daphne at Harry's left. Plates flashed into existence nearby as the school registered their presence and the girls began to load up as Harry pulled out a sheet of parchment and a quill, wanting to get a letter ready for his family before the owls arrived so he could send their always busy family owl back off with minimal turnaround time.

To My (Mostly) Loving Family,

Hey guys! I know I've only been gone a day, but I hope everyone's doing okay. I was sorted into Gryffindor, just like you were, Mum and Dad. I hope you're proud of me. Tell my sisters I miss them (even though I really only miss you two), and that I'll see them when I come back for Christmas Break... or I get expelled, whichever happens first. Hogwarts seems nice so far. It's a bit of a walk to Gryffindor Tower, but with all the exercise I got this summer it's no problem for me. I've met a girl who reminds me a lot of you, Mum: muggleborn, absolutely brilliant, and not afraid to stand up for what she believes in. Neville Longbottom called her a mudblood and she knocked a few of his teeth out. Wicked, huh?

I share a dorm with the prat too. He's an arrogant bully, and not a particularly intelligent one at that. So far, he's already been laid out by two girls (Hermione, the girl I mentioned before, and Daphne Greengrass, whose mother Dad might know) and when he threatened to go after them again, I zapped him one for good

measure. Hopefully he'll get better as the year goes on, or one of us might not leave the school alive in June.

Gotta go. I can see Silver Star coming in for a landing, so I'll wrap this letter up so I can send it out as soon as I get your letter off him.

Love you all,
Harry

Just as he'd written at the end of his letter, Harry could see Silver Star coming in for a landing even as he rolled up the letter for mailing. The slightly elderly owl divebombed the table, slamming into a bowl of fruit and sending apples rolling down the table. While not quite Errol of the Weasleys (he'd yet to fly into a window or anything), he was getting on in years and was still kept quite busy. Lifting the poor owl free, Harry took the letter he carried before coming to a decision. "Go head up to the owlery and send Hedwig down, okay, boy? You can rest here for a day and when she comes back tomorrow, you can take my next letter home."

Silver Star hooted in relief and winged away, leaving Harry with his first letter from home. Absently assembling a plate of food and digging in, Harry used his other hand to unroll the parchment so he could see what his mother (presumably; he couldn't see his father sitting down to write him an entire letter) had to say.

Hey Sweetie!

How'd the sorting go? I hope you were sorted into Gryffindor like your father and I were, although Ravenclaw isn't bad and neither is Hufflepuff. Slytherin... well, if you're in Slytherin, I'll still love you no matter what your father says. After all, most of Sirius's family came from Slytherin... and except for one cousin of his, they're all psychotic criminals, so maybe I shouldn't use them as an example.

Sirius and your father said to pull as many pranks as you can, starting as soon as possible. Amy and I said your uncle and your father are going to be sleeping on couches for the next week. Keep that in mind before you try something. I want to hear nothing but good things about you from your teachers.

It's so odd not having you here, sweetie, even if you are shortening my lifespan with broomless flying tricks or strange new spells you find in the library. I realized that these past few months, I've been

spending most of my time with you. Now that you're gone, I try spend time with your sisters, but they're both too busy for me. And they're only ten!

I feel like such an old woman some days.

Anyways, good luck with your first day of classes. And for the love of God, Merlin, and anyone else listening... watch yourself around Severus Snape. Dumbledore may trust him to teach you children, but I've known him since before I went to Hogwarts. He is a vile, hateful man and you should be on your guard around him at all times.

Love,
Mum

PS: If you absolutely feel the need to prank someone, prank Snape.

Harry was frowning as he finished reading the letter. Not that he hadn't been planning to stay on his guard against Snape anyways... but to have his own mother warn him was alarming. He hadn't been aware of any closeness between them in his old universe. Since before Hogwarts, though? A very, very interesting piece of news. When Snape looked into his eyes and saw Lily Evans, what was he really seeing? A childhood companion, lost to him? A bitter school rival, like his father had been? A former lover, who had sought the companionship of another man?

Hedwig disrupted his thoughts as she swooped down, grabbing the letter he'd written in her talons and taking back off before he could stop her. Hmmp. Cheeky owl. Well, there was always the next day's letter home. He could ask his mother those questions and more then.

Percy bustled past, dropping four schedules in the middle of the table near them. It took Hermione, Harry, Su, and Daphne a few moments to sort out whose schedule belonged to who... at which point they all laughed, realizing that at this point, they all shared the same scheduled. Harry looked it over; pretty much the same as he remembered. Thrice-weekly Herbology classes with Professor Sprout, History of Magic on Mondays and Wednesdays, Astronomy late on Wednesdays, Transfiguration, Charms, and DADA on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and double Potions with the afternoon off on Fridays.

That in mind, Harry began to eat faster. Some of the plants down in Greenhouse Three could be trying at the best of times. He'd need the energy.

Joe's Note: Alright, in celebration of this fic wandering even further off the beaten path, I've gone back and done major changes to the first chapter along with cleaning up the other five. Stuff my betas didn't catch, stuff you guys did catch, etc. Also, the first half of chapter one is almost entirely different. Doesn't affect much but you might wanna go read it if you have time.

The first week of classes was fun, reminding Harry of the simple joy of magic back in his first year at Hogwarts. Mostly because... well, it was his first year. Again. As best he could tell (he hadn't wandered off in search of the third year and above elective teachers), all the same professors were here and acted the same. Well, Flitwick hadn't fallen off his stack of books in excitement the first time he called 'Harry Potter' in Charms... but he had done it a few seconds before for 'Neville Longbottom', which was close enough in Harry's book.

He'd been looking forward to a chance to finally one-up Hermione (which wasn't really fair, considering he had seven years of very advanced training on her) but found himself denied both in that class and Transfiguration, where she and Su quickly paired off together. Dean and Wanda had done likewise, drawn together as friends by their shared muggle upbringing. That left him with Daphne, Lavender, Neville, or the Boy-Who-Lived's lapdog, who also answered to the name Ron. Like Lavender herself, the answer was a no brainer.

This time with a friend of equivalent intellect by her side, Hermione and Su quickly raced through the first lesson, egging each on in a competition to be the first with a properly transfigured matchstick. Under other circumstances, they would have come in first and second, earning Gryffindor ten points a piece for their work. Unfortunately for the two girls, they were competing against someone who had mastered the lesson seven years ago. With a haphazard flick of his wand, Harry turned his matchstick into a needle, earning him ten points and a comment about his father's prowess in the discipline.

Daphne was the only member of their little group to struggle with the assignment and after watching her fail for the fifth time, Harry reached out and put his hand over hers. After seeing her blast Neville the night before, he knew she had power and control. Despite her unfamiliarity with the particular spell, the transfiguration should have

been no problem for her... if she was approaching it the right way. Rather than lecture her, though, the way Hermione was prone to when she knew something that someone else didn't, Harry asked her a simple question. "How did you perform such a magnificent stunner last night, Daphne?"

"Easy, I just focused on the idea of stunning Largebottom for that look he gave me, harnessed the power, and funneled it through my wand to keep it from being wild magic. Come on, Potter, you're from a magical household. You should know something that sim..." Daphne abruptly trailed off and looked from Harry to the matchstick and back. Harry just smirked and raised an eyebrow. Turning her attention to her matchstick, Daphne waved her wand and said the incantation on the board, the slim shaft of wood warping and shifting into a perfect sewing needle. "Well I'll be. Thanks, Potter."

Twirling his own wand, Harry tucked it away as he sketched a shallow bow. "No problem. And Daphne? My name is Harry."

Daphne stared at him for a moment with penetrating blue eyes before shrugging. "If you insist. Harry."

As much as he tried to be surprised, Harry couldn't even manage to fake it when neither Ron nor Neville managed to finish the assignment by the end of class. Each received a hefty homework assignment for their trouble, one he'd done himself the first time around. Heh. That'd keep them down in the library and away from him for a while. Victory was his... even though he really hadn't done anything.

In Charms, Su and Hermione again paired off to aid and compete against each other, leaving Daphne and Harry together. Neither minded too terribly much, though, and after Harry once again stymied the dynamic duo's quest to be the first to perform the class's assignment (in this case, levitating a feather), he started tickling Daphne with his flying feather. Faster than she'd managed in transfiguration, Daphne mastered the spell and almost poked his eye out as she whipped her feather shaft-first at him, a rather familiar smirk on her face as she let it drift away before dive-bombing him again.

"Now that's just rude. And here I was going to make you a present." Daphne raised an eyebrow at that statement and gestured for him to proceed. Harry jabbed his wand out toward the pile of spare feathers on the table in front of Flitwick's podium, summoning them to his desk. The diminutive charms master let out a squeak of surprise as a torrent of feathers tumbled past him and over to the first year, but Harry ignored him as he let his magic twist through each of the individual feathers, pulling them together into a single creation. The end result was a gorgeous white ostrich feather boa, that Harry looped around Daphne's neck. "And maybe... *mutare coloris*." A burst of magic twisted through Daphne's blonde locks, leaving a few thin white streaks that accented both the braid she'd chosen to wear that day and her new fashion accessory.

"YOU!" Hermione hopped up from her seat, Su clinging to her side as the muggleborn witch pointed her wand in his direction. "You really are the one who put these bloody awful streaks in my hair! Fix it! Now!"

Harry chuckled at that; somehow, her hair had survived a visit to the sixth and seventh year female prefects and she'd taken Su's advice that day, braiding the red sections and ending each with a gold bead. He found it rather fetching on her, or at least as fetching as he could find an eleven year-old girl without feeling like a pedophile. Somehow, though, Harry doubted this version of Hermione's sense of aesthetics was well enough developed to override her indignation at him charming her without permission and so he waved his wand, silently cancelling the charm. After a moment, the red oozed its way up her hair like watching an ink spill in reverse, disappearing into her scalp and leaving behind pure brown hair. "There."

There was a soft chuckle from beside him and Harry looked over to find Daphne admiring herself in a small mirror. "You're lucky you don't live in our dorm, or I'd be suggesting you sleep with one eye open. Some of the things that come out of that girl's mouth... I've never heard such creative yet disturbing examples of profanity in my life. She's even worse than my father was, that time he found out my mother had spent a quarter of the family's budgeted galleons for the year on new shoes."

Hmm. If this version of Daphne's family was equally as rich as the version from his universe... that was a whole lot of shoes. Harry looked down at his feet. He only had two of them: one left and one right. What did someone need that many shoes for?

Given that he'd never liked his fame, Harry found the following day particularly amusing. So many others, Ron among them, had wanted to be him in his old world and so it was fun to step back and watch as someone else experienced what he lived with... even if it was just an evil dungeon-dwelling bat.

"Ah yes. Neville Longbottom. Our new... celebrity." Snape went through roll call before his dark eyes rose from the parchment, sweeping back over the class slowly. "You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion making. As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and even stopper death... if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach."

There were snickers from the Slytherin side of the room even as the Gryffindors muttered; most of the older students had warned the first years about Snape's preferential treatment toward his own house and so both sides were prepared for a class period full of biased point deductions and awards. At least this time, with Su and common sense to moderate her enthusiasm, Hermione wasn't sitting on the edge of her seat, ready to thrust her arm into the air at the first sign of a question.

Snape paused for a long moment before whirling to glare in Longbottom's direction. "Longbottom! What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

"I don't know, sir."

Sneer firmly in place, Snape clucked his tongue. "Tut tut, Longbottom. Fame clearly isn't everything. Let's try again, shall we? Longbottom, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?"

Neville, looking as clueless as usual, gave a helpless shrug. "I don't know, sir."

"Decided not to open a book before coming to my class, eh, Longbottom?" Harry smirked; he, Hermione, Su, and Daphne had taken over a corner of the common room the night before with their copies of One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi and Magical Drafts and Potions. Oddly enough, Hermione had barely touched either before that point, not finding herbology or potions to be particularly fascinating subjects, but all four were now passably informed in case Snape turned his attention their way. "What is the difference, Longbottom, between monkshood and wolfsbane?"

Neville sighed. "I don't know." Then the unfairness of his situation finally seemed to occur to him, and he glared at Snape. "Why are you picking on me? I bet nobody else in here could answer those questions either!"

After pondering his request for a moment, Snape grinned evilly at Longbottom. "Very well. Potter!" Whirling, Snape jabbed a finger in the direction of his school nemesis's spawn. "Asphodel and wormwood. What happens when I combine them?"

Harry just smirked back at the potion master. Well, he had gotten permission from his mother, after all. "I'm going to go out on a limb and say... some sort of potion. Right?"

"Amusing. Asphodel and wormwood make a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death, Potter." Drawing closer, Snape loomed over Harry and Daphne, staring down with malicious black eyes. "Perhaps you can tell me where a bezoar comes from, then, since you lack knowledge of basic potions?"

Pondering that for a moment, Harry shrugged and grinned. "An apothecary?"

Titters of laughter greeted his flippant answer, at least until Snape looked up and his glare cowed the class. "Technically correct... once they have been harvested from the stomach of a goat. They can save you from most poisons, which is what makes them relevant in my domain. Neither potions nor the requisite equipment seems to be your forte... perhaps ingredients? Monkshood and wolfsbane. What's the difference, Potter?"

"Oh, I know this one. They're the same. It's also called aconite. I hear it's a great way to add a little flavor to your tea when you're expecting a potion master over." Harry narrowed his eyes as he met Snape's gaze, hoping the man would lash out mentally if provoked verbally. "Particularly *Aconitum ferox*." Oh yes, he would love to give this man another dose of *Aconitum ferox* if he could manage to get away with it. Nothing beat a nice mug of elf-made hot cocoa, some biscuits, and watching your childhood tormentor vomit and then asphyxiate as his respiratory system failed...

The glare that Snape gave him made it very clear to Harry that his gibe had not escaped the older man's notice; he was most certainly aware that Harry wasn't suggesting a medicinal use for aconite. The professor's eyes drifted down to Harry's book before widening as he took in the scribbles filling the margins, written in a looping script far too feminine to be his. "Mr. Potter... would you care to tell me why your book has been defaced before your first class period?"

Harry looked down at his book and then smiled as his gaze met Snape's. "They're my mum's. We had enough money for new ones, but I decided to bring hers with me instead. Inheriting power from my parents... it's almost like being a prince, wouldn't you say?" He gave the professor a cheeky little wink and that was enough to set the man off, sending Snape crashing into his occlumency shields with the subtlety of a wounded dragon. Harry's grin widened. Gotcha.

Mentally begging forgiveness from all the deities he could think of, Harry began to work quickly, pulling memories together to craft a fake image in his mind. The core was one of his sexual encounters with Ginny; this particular one being a time he'd taken her from behind, meaning Snape wouldn't be able to see her face. Several times that summer, his family been down to a nearby river to swim and so he

was quite easily able to change Ginny in his mind, substituting in his mother's hair color, current length and style, and replacing Ginny's freckles with a few birthmarks on his mother's otherwise flawless back.

Somewhat amused and utterly disturbed and repulsed by what he'd done, Harry pushed the image forward into a buffer zone and then let his shields flutter as Snape probed a nearby section. Taking the bait, Snape slammed all his strength into probing the 'weakened' area and after a moment, Harry let the outer layer of shielding fall to expose the fabricated memory. After a moment of hesitation, possibly suspecting a trap, Snape latched on... and then abruptly turned almost as green as his house's colors in the real world as he was treated to the incestuous tableau. The connection broke abruptly as Snape stumbled back, wrenching his head to the side. "Forty points from Gryffindor. The potion is on the board. Get to work." Protests broke out from both sides, the Slytherins unhappy with the lack of actual instruction and the Gryffindors complaining about both that and the point removal. "NOW! Or I'll have you all serving a week's detentions with Filch!"

Harry chuckled. Victory was his! Again! And he'd actually done something this time!

A week later came something Harry had been dreading: flying lessons. Not that he was afraid of flying, far from it. But evidently this Neville Longbottom had more in common with Harry's prior self than just the scar: he too wanted to be seeker for the Gryffindor team, although he saw it and the bending of the 'no brooms for first years' rule to be his right as the Boy-Who-Lived rather than a privilege. Arrogant brat.

It left Harry in a dilemma, though. What to do if the Remembrall situation (or something close enough) came up again? Did he let Longbottom take care of it, securing the boy a position on the Gryffindor team? Well, assuming he actually had any skill, which Harry doubted. If he did let Longbottom go and he failed, not only would the Boy-Who-Lived not be on the team but then neither would Harry, at least until second year. But if he did allow the events of his

former universe to replay themselves, he'd be making himself stand out more and breeding further resentment from Longbottom's corner.

Choices choices.

Su and Daphne were both old hands on brooms by this point, having come from pureblood families, while Hermione was again a bit nervous. At least she wasn't terrified of heights or flying in this universe. As best Harry could tell, she was just nervous she'd be horrible at flying, which would have caused problems as far as her desire to play quidditch later in her Hogwarts career. Hopefully she'd be at least a passable flier, though; even if it turned out she was unsuitable for quidditch, it would be nice to have her able to join him on the pitch in her spare time instead of nagging him about revising like her old self had.

After lunch that day, the Gryffindors and Slytherins made their way out onto the grounds for their first (and only, Harry mused, unless the others had been given further classes he'd been exempt from) flying lesson. There were two rows of ten brooms lying on the grass when they arrived and without a thought, the two houses moved to stand facing each other with the brooms in between. Harry and Hermione again formed the buffer zone between the boys and girls but the division wasn't quite as even among the snakes. Malfoy was sandwiched between Crabbe and Goyle on one end, followed by Nott and then the mysterious Winifred Burkle. She was given a wide berth on either side by Nott and Pārvaṭī, then Parkinson, Bulstrode, Davis, and O'Mochain filled out the rest of the Slytherin row.

There were actually only nine Gryffindors on the field, though, the tenth appearing as he trailed behind Madam Hooch. "For the last time, Longbottom, I have nothing to do with the house's quidditch teams. I am merely the referee for the school's matches. If you are willing to attend try-outs on a school broom and are selected by Mister Wood, then perhaps you'll be allowed to have a broom sent from home but that's not my decision." Huffing, she stopped at one end of the brooms, forcing Neville to run all the way down to the other to take up a spot next to Ron. Her yellow, hawk-like eyes raked back and forth over them before she snorted. "Well, what are you waiting for? Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up."

"You're going to need your dominant hand for this, so right-handed flyers to the left of the broom and vice versa. Everyone got it?" There was a chorus of vaguely affirmative replies and Hooch gave a sharp nod. "Now hold your hand out over the broom and say 'Up!'."

"UP!"

A few brooms rolled over and twitched. Neville got a rude shock as his flew up to hit him in the face before dropping to the grass again, making him stumble back and fall on his ass. Surprisingly, Malfoy and both of his gorillas got theirs off the ground on the first try, while Burkle's broom appeared to be trying to burrow underground to get away from her. Harry reflexively closed his fingers around the shaft of his broom as it jumped to his hand, letting out a sigh of relief as Hermione managed it just as easily.

Mounting their brooms, the students waited while Hooch patrolled up and down the two rows, checking their grips and where they were positioned on the broom. "Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground. Decently hard, mind you, the charms on the broom take a second or two to kick in and if you don't get high enough you'll be smacking your shins into the ground instead of flying. Once you are in the air, keep your broom steady until you're confident. Lean back and rise a few feet, then lean forward and point the nose down to descend again to the ground. Slowly. On my whistle... three... two... one..."

Harry kicked off, easily leveling off into a hover and looking over at Hermione and the girls. Su and Daphne followed suit and then came the moment of truth: Hermione. He was worried over nothing, though; his muggleborn friend made the transition from ground to air as smoothly as Su and Daphne. "Huh. That's it? This... this is too easy." Hermione grinned and rose a few feet before tipping to one side, rolling her broom a full three hundred and sixty degrees before straightening up. Harry winced and averted his eyes. "What?"

"Hermione?" Oh thank Merlin that Su was going to step in here so he didn't have to find a delicate way to point out the problem without sounding like he'd been perving on her. "Let's just say... there's a

reason that female quidditch players wear trousers and not skirts when out on the pitch."

Looking up, Harry watched a dark flush spread over Hermione's cheeks but before things could progress further, shouts from the end of the line of floating students caught their attention. Longbottom and Malfoy were arguing and, as Harry watched in amusement, Malfoy rocketed forward and knocked Longbottom off his broom. Even though they weren't too far off the ground, Longbottom must have landed just wrong because there was a sickening crack that heralded at least one broken bone.

"Déjà vu..."

"Mister Longbottom! Mister Malfoy! Ten points each from Gryffindor and Slytherin for your inane posturing and another five from Slytherin, Malfoy, for your attack on Longbottom." Hooch stomped over to where Longbottom was curled in a whimpering ball on the grass. Leaning down, she pulled his arm away from his chest and waved her wand over it. "As I suspected. Broken wrist." Standing again, she glared at the rest of the class. "I need to bring Longbottom to the Hospital Wing. If I see any of you in the air, you will regret it. Especially you, Malfoy."

Everyone in the class nodded their assent but, true to form, as soon as Hooch and Longbottom were out of sight, Malfoy dashed forward to scoop up a certain familiar Remembrall and began playing with it. Huh. Longbottom was out of the way and Malfoy was going to give him the same chance all over again... it was just too convenient. Harry debated with himself for a moment but in the end, he couldn't resist the urge. "Hand over the Remembrall, Malfoy."

While Malfoy hadn't had to deal with him directly yet, clearly stories of Harry's confrontation with Longbottom in their shared dorm had spread as far as Slytherin because the blonde boy's sneer flickered for a moment before reasserting itself. "No, I don't think I will, Potter. Maybe I'll leave it up a tree for him to find. We'll see if the fat braggart can manage to fetch it, or if he's completely worthless on a broom."

Malfoy lifted off the ground again, Remembrall in hand, and Harry waved off the protests of his friends as he mounted his broom and gave pursuit. "No Crabbe or Goyle up here to protect you from people who won't be bullied by you, Malfoy." Harry grinned as he rocketed towards the Slytherin, hands leaving the broom long enough to shrug off his flapping robes and let them flutter to the ground. "Now hand over the Remembrall or I'll ram you off the broom and pry it out of your fingers while they drag you to the hospital wing."

"Fine. You think you're so great, Potter?" Sneering, Malfoy drew his arm back and hurled the glowing red Remembrall towards the school, where the upward sloping ground would ensure he'd run out of time to catch it faster. Harry hadn't thought Malfoy that clever. Or maybe he wasn't and Harry was just giving him too much credit. Either way, there was a ball that needed catching and he was just the man for the job.

Wheeling around, Harry dove after the ball, pushing the battered school broom to top speed as he pursued his target. He knew he couldn't catch it too early, though; it had to be spectacular, now that he'd committed to this course of action. If it wasn't, he'd just earn punishment for defying Madam Hooch's instructions and not the seeker position. Finally, two feet above the ground, he wrapped his fingers around the Remembrall and pulled up. His toes brushed gently over the grass, leaving two ruffled paths behind him as he came to a complete stop.

Wait for it.

Wait for it...

"HARRY POTTER!" Ah, there was an angry Professor McGonagall, right on time. "Never, in all my time at Hogwarts... how dare you... might have broken your neck and how would I have explained that to your parents... not even James pulled something that stupid in his youth..." Composing herself with visible effort, she waited until he dismounted from the broom, taking it from him and shoving it into the approaching Hermione's hands. "Potter. Follow me. Now."

Hermione, Su, Daphne, and even Ron and Longbottom's other followers looked ready to protest until Harry silenced them with a shake of his head. Tossing the Remembrall to Ron, Harry obediently followed behind his head of house, having to jog to keep up with her impatient, long-legged strides. He didn't feel the same dread as last time around, though, seeing as he knew exactly how this was going to play out. He did his best to at least look nervous so McGonagall wouldn't get suspicious, skidding to a stop behind her as she came to a halt at the Charms classroom. "Professor Flitwick? Might I borrow Wood for a moment?"

A too mature yet partially immature portion of his brain wanted to comment on how utterly dirty that sounded, but Harry managed to keep his mouth shut. Plastering on a look of confusion, Harry followed along as McGonagall led him and his future captain down the hall and into an empty classroom. Oliver was the first to speak up. "Erm, Professor? What's going on? Charms isn't exactly my strongest subject and this is OWL year..."

McGonagall waved off his protests and then proceeded to make introductions. "Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood... I've found you a seeker."

Suddenly, Oliver's scholastic concerns melted away in the face of quidditch talk. "Are you serious, Professor?"

"No, she's Professor McGonagall. Sirius is my godfather."

After a moment of silence, McGonagall sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose. "I had hoped I'd never hear that pathetic joke again after Mister Black graduated. He has a daughter starting here next year too, doesn't he?" Harry nodded and McGonagall gave an outright groan at that. "Wonderful. But yes, Wood, he's a natural. Caught a falling Remembrall on a school broom with only a foot or two to spare. I doubt Charlie Weasley could have pulled off a move like that."

Oliver looked ecstatic, walking in a slow circle around Harry. "He's just the right build for a seeker, too. Light... speedy... Potter, you have a decent broom at home you can send for, right?" Harry nodded

but looked over at his head of house, raising an eyebrow. "Err, assuming we can get that pesky first year broom ban lifted for him, Professor?"

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we can't bend that first year rule, yes. Heaven knows we need a better team than last year. As good as Weasley was... flattened in that horrible match against Slytherin. I couldn't look Severus in the face for weeks..." McGonagall trailed off before turning and peering sternly over the top of her glasses at Harry. "I want to hear that you're training hard, Potter, or I may punish you for today's incident after all. Understand?"

Harry nodded, then something occurred to him and he bit his lip. It would be pushing his luck... but it was just so bloody brilliant, he couldn't help himself. "Professor? Could you ask about getting the broom rule lifted for Hermione Granger as well?" McGonagall gave him an odd look and Harry turned to Oliver. "Is it true that you took a bludger to the head in your first game and spent a week in the hospital wing?"

"Err, yes?"

Turning back to the professor, Harry continued to unfold his trap. "I bet Gryffindor lost that game, right? I mean, without a keeper, the other team could run up sixteen goals in no time and then let Gryffindor catch the snitch and it wouldn't matter." She nodded slowly. "Now... is there a rule in place that keeps house teams from having reserve players for if someone is sick or injured on the field?" A shake of her head. "Hermione plays goalkeeper for her field hockey team back in the muggle world; you had to repair her leg when you visited from what she told me. It's a sport where they try to get a fist-sized ball past her into a net. And it's moving a lot faster than a quaffle. Can you think of anyone more perfect to be Gryffindor's reserve keeper for if Wood gets hurt again? And when he graduates, Hermione can take over as keeper so we won't have to go through a new captain and a new keeper at the same time. The team will be used to Hermione already."

McGonagall's jaw dropped for a moment before she composed herself. "That... is startlingly brilliant, Potter. You look so much like

your father that sometimes I forget you seem to have inherited your mother's intelligence. Five points to Gryffindor for... something logic-related; I can't think of a good way to phrase it right now." That earned her shocked looks from the two students and she shrugged before offering a small smile that looked odd on their normally stern head of house. "You act as if I'm unaware of Professor Snape's tendencies. If he can take points away for little to no reason, I can award them for the same. Now run along. I'll let you know about Miss Granger's situation as soon as I talk to the headmaster."

While Oliver returned to class and McGonagall left, presumably to talk to Dumbledore, Harry remained in the room and watched from the window as the class continued to learn basic flying technique from Madam Hooch. Hermione really wasn't half bad for someone who'd never touched a broom before. Certainly not the prodigy he was, but... hell, probably better than Ron. Turning her into a keeper wouldn't be that hard.

Hopefully.

Joe's Note: I'd like to thank the folks over at DLP right now. Because they hate me and feel a need to create threads expressly to bash me as a person, under the guise of 'reviewing' any Harry Potter story I post, I've now got my fic scattered over about a dozen different sites that watch DLP's activity and my reviews and hits have literally doubled. So... thanks for being unable to let nonexistent slights from the past go, I suppose?

After the bell tolled to indicate the current class period was over, Harry grabbed his bag and made his way out of the abandoned classroom. Heading for the ground floor, he scowled at the sight of Malfoy and his cronies making their way into the Entrance Hall. It was tempting, oh so tempting to hex the little bastard just on general principle. Then again, if Malfoy hadn't pulled his stupid stunt, Harry wouldn't be on the quidditch team so he couldn't REALLY complain, now could he?

Behind the trio were Su, Daphne, and Hermione. As they spotted their wayward friend, they broke into a run (or in Daphne's case, a fast yet refined walk) towards him, Hermione accidentally bumping against Malfoy as she passed. "Oy! Mudblood! Watch where you're going!"

Su and Daphne kept moving but Hermione came to an abrupt stop and Harry let a wide grin stretch over his features, knowing what was about to happen. As much as he should be the mature one in his group of friends, being older by six years... there was something infinitely satisfying about watching Malfoy get beaten up, especially by a girl. Dropping her book bag with a loud thump, Hermione slowly turned to face Malfoy. "What did you just say?"

"You heard me, mudblood." Far braver now that he was back on the ground, Malfoy made a show out of brushing off the spot where Hermione had brushed against him. "I don't need you getting your filthy mudblood germs on my robes. Who knows what I might catch from you?"

Hermione stomped forward, hands curling into fists. Evidently while Malfoy had heard tales of Harry's attack on Neville, Hermione's

exploits either hadn't made it to the dungeons or had been brushed off because of their muggle nature. Harry knew from experience, though, that having your bones broken by brute force was just as painful as by magic. Stopping in front of the arrogant pureblood, Hermione held up her left hand and extended her index finger. "Call me a mudblood... one more time."

Leaning in, Malfoy grinned widely. "Mudblo..."

He didn't get to finish.

Hermione extended her middle finger to give Malfoy the two-fingered salute before her right hand came up and drove itself into his nose with a sickening crunch. Stumbling back with a cry, Malfoy tripped over the hem of his robes and fell flat on his arse, staring up at Hermione in fear. "God. You purebloods are supposed to be sophisticated. Learn some bloody fucking manners." Turning away, she scooped up her bag and marched over to Harry. Pausing in front of him, she crossed her arms over her chest and glared. "What?"

"Has anyone ever told you that you have anger management issues, Hermione?"

"Yes. Now tell us what happened to you when McGonagall took you away before I punch you."

"Just checking." Wrapping an arm around her shoulders, Harry pulled her down the hall as Su and Daphne fell in behind them. "As for our lovely deputy headmistress... let me tell you the tale of a poor little half-blood and his angry head of house..."

For the sorting hat, day-to-day life was generally rather peaceful. Apart from one time a year when he had to sit on students' heads and determine which house they were best suited for, his days were filled with the quiet solitude of the headmaster's office. Every now and then though, the headmaster received a visitor or two that disturbed the hat's peace and quiet... such as was occurring at the moment.

"I demand you do something about Potter, Albus! One of his friends just assaulted a member of my house, he's attacked his own peers, and the things I've seen in his mind..." Severus Snape trailed off, shivering violently. "He's a deviant, incestuous spawn of the devil and I don't want him in this school!"

Minerva McGonagall rounded on the sallow, hook-nosed professor with eyes flashing. "'Seen in his mind', eh? Would you first like to explain why you're using legilimency on my students, and then we'll move on to whatever you think you've seen in young Mister Potter's mind?"

Holding up one hand, Albus Dumbledore waited for the two to turn their attention to him. "Minerva, you know that Severus has my complete trust. I have authorized him to use any and every method at his disposal to ensure the safety of this school, especially with what we've hidden in the bowels of the school this year, and that includes legilimency. Now Severus, I know you had your problems with James Potter when the two of you were in school together... are you certain that your past is not clouding your view of the present?"

"Yes. I am quite certain what I saw in Potter's mind, and it disturbs me greatly." Both Dumbledore and McGonagall gave him their full attention, which caused Snape to pause and fidget uncomfortably. "When I dove into his mind, I found the shields that the sorting hat reported but was able to breach them. The first thing I found was a... that is to say..."

Dumbledore leaned forward, resting his elbows on his desk as he waited for the explanation. "Yes, my boy?"

Grimacing, Snape sighed and gave up on trying to mince words. "I saw him partaking in a sexual encounter. No, he didn't walk in on one. It was from his perspective. And it was with someone who, shall we say, had a very familiar shade of red hair."

McGonagall gasped and leaned away, gaze bouncing from Snape to Dumbledore and back. "No! You don't think that Harry Potter is sexually abusing one of his younger sisters, do you? I can't believe that something like that could happen right under James and Lily's

noses... especially with Lily staying home to take care of the children."

"Do you know where Lily hails from, Minerva?" McGonagall shook her head and Snape sighed, slouching back in his chair. "The same town as I do. I grew up with her and, as you may or may not remember, we were good friends up until fifth year. While I can't say I knew intimately, I was very familiar with her body... we used to go swimming and such when school was out. No, I didn't just recognize the hair. I recognized the person." Hands clenching at the arms of his chair, Snape scowled. "Harry Potter is not sexually abusing his younger sisters. Harry Potter is in an Oedipal relationship with his own mother."

There was a long moment of silence, and then Dumbledore began laughing loudly. "Oh, Severus, I didn't know you had a sense of humor. I haven't had someone trick me so completely since the Weasley twins last semester." He slowly began to trail off as Snape failed to crack a smile. "You are joking, aren't you Severus?" The potion master shook his head. "Sweet Merlin."

As much as it wanted to, the hat couldn't keep silent any longer and burst out laughing, drawing all attention to itself. "Oh Severus, you foolish little man. I had to ask the Potter boy to lower his shields. Me. An artifact created by the Founders themselves. Do you really think you of all people have the power to break through shields that I could not? You saw nothing more than what he wanted to show you."

Hopeful blue eyes turned to the hat. "Truly?" Dumbledore rose from his seat, rounding the desk and approaching the hat's perch. "Are you certain that whatever Severus saw was a deliberate distraction?"

"Quite. I have no doubt that had he been prepared for me, Potter could have assembled illusions to direct me to sort him into the house of his choosing. The boy possesses uncanny natural ability in the mental arts." Actually, they were abilities honed with great practice and care, brought over when the seventeen year-old was stuffed into a younger body in this universe, but the enchantments that forced him to keep the students' secrets prevented him from saying as much. "Suffice it to say, Severus, that Potter probably knew of your

unrequited interest from discussions with his mother and used it against you when you invaded his mind by creating such a disturbing mental image."

Sighing in relief, the headmaster wandered back over to sit in his plush chair. "You see, my boy? Just a prank. It would appear that young Harry takes after his father in more than just looks. Although I would advise staying out of his mind in the future, just to avoid further misunderstandings." Snape scowled but nodded sharply in assent. "Now, Minerva, what did you want to see me about?"

McGonagall eyed Snape for a moment, clearly not thrilled about letting the subject drop, before turning her attention to the headmaster. "I need an exemption from the first year broom ban for two of my students: Hermione Granger and Harry Potter. They're going to be Gryffindor's reserve keeper and starting seeker, respectively, and it would keep me from needing to do something ridiculous. Such as, say, purchasing two Nimbus 2000s for my own use and just happening to loan them out to Granger and Potter regularly."

"Oh yes, that's a brilliant idea. Let's reward the students who disobey their instructors and assault their housemate." Snape lurched up out of his chair and stomped toward the door. "No wonder your house is full of a bunch of little terrors."

Leaning in her seat, McGonagall called back over her shoulder. "Perhaps if your students could manage to walk the halls without starting fights, my students would walk the halls without ending them. Quid pro quo, Severus." The black-clad man paused for a moment before exiting the headmaster's office, slamming the door behind him. McGonagall returned her attention to the man who actually mattered in the situation. "Well, Albus? You know you want to see what happens when the first muggleborn player in the history of the school takes the pitch."

Grinning, Dumbledore stroked his beard slowly. "It does have the potential to be quite amusing, yes. And I doubt lack of official permission would stop a Potter from bringing a broom onto the grounds now that he's on the team. Yes. Have young Mister Potter

owl home to have his broom sent to the school. As for Miss Granger, owl Quality Quidditch Supplies for a Nimbus 2000. Have them charge it to my vault."

That brought the conversation to an end and McGonagall rushed from the headmaster's office to deliver her good news. As soon as she was gone, the sorting hat chuckled. "You do know that you're going to have to wear me to the Gryffindor/Slytherin game this year, right?"

"Yes, of course. I might even give all the house elves some time off so they can watch. It promises to be an interesting game. Why?"

"Good. Ten galleons on a Slytherin getting hospitalized if Wood gets knocked out and Granger goes in."

"That, my friend, is what I believe the children call a 'sucker bet'. Besides, what would you do with ten galleons?"

"...bribe one of the house elves to clean me? Honestly, Albus, have you SEEN me lately? And I think that Longbottom whelp had lice..."

Harry looked around in confusion, wondering when and how he'd been transported to the Hogwarts Express. Outside, he could see the hustle and bustle of Platform Nine and Three-Quarters as parents and children said their goodbyes, the train loading up for its fall trip to Hogwarts.

The door to his compartment opened and Hermione, Su, and Daphne stuck their heads in. While keeping his face impassive as to not give away his lack of understanding, inwardly Harry was beyond confused. They were definitely the girls of his new universe, but they were older. Not by much, second year at most, but older nonetheless. He gave each a vaguely friendly greeting before letting them settle down around him, Su and Hermione taking up their customary spots across from him and leaning in to talk to each other as Daphne seated herself next to him. "Good summer?"

Daphne gave him an odd look before snorting and shaking her head. "You were there for most of it, Harry. You tell me."

Ooh, awkward. Harry decided to cut his losses and shut up until he could figure out what was really going on. The compartment door opened again and Harry looked up to find someone he knew... yet didn't. Oh, he was quite familiar with her from his own universe but as best he could tell, they'd never met in this one and so he had to... "Hullo, Harry Potter. I've been looking all up and down the train for you. You're not in our usual compartment. Then again, it was infested with nargles so I can hardly blame you..."

Or not.

Luna Lovegood flounced into the compartment, clad in the untrimmed robes and black tie of an unsorted student. After a moment of consideration, she threw one leg over Harry's lap and straddled it, resting her head on his shoulder. Harry looked from the blonde, over at the fiercely glaring Daphne, and then on to the other first year girl standing in the doorway. "Come on in, Lara. Evidently you two are riding with us this morning."

"So... you know these girls?" Hermione eyed Harry's new lap ornament before giving Lara a slightly longer inspection. Harry couldn't blame her; the girl was rather unusual looking. Unfortunately, Lara's family had taken the pureblood idea a bit too far in the generations before her, causing odd genetic abnormalities to crop up in the bloodline. Thankfully, both her paternal grandfather and her father had gone out of their way to bring in new, outside blood and so Lara was cursed with only a quarter of the deficient gene pool. It was enough, though, to cause her to inherit piebaldism, marking her with a pure white stripe in her auburn hair and very bad eyesight. Pulled back into a ponytail, the white stripe made her resemble a skunk and the unfortunate nickname had stuck... until Harry had taken her under his wing at Luna and Ginny's insistence and she'd begun unleashing vicious hexes on anyone who harassed her about her looks. At least in the original universe, at any rate. "Are you going to introduce us, or are we going to sit here awkwardly all day, Harry?"

"Act'lly, I dun ken 'im at all. I ken Luna." Lara pointed at the blonde before shrugging helplessly. "I'm jus followin, her cause I dun ken any'ne else on the train yet. But I'm Lara. Lara Ramsay. Tis good to be kennin ya."

"Hermione Granger."

"Li Su."

"Daphne Greengrass."

"The Boy-Who-Was-A-Cushion."

Luna giggled at that one, leaning up to whisper in his ear. "You can't seem to stay away from hyphenated names, can you, Harry?" Harry narrowed his eyes; was she referring to his former position as the Boy-Who-Lived? And if so, how on earth did she know about that? Pulling back, she smiled widely at the other four girls. "And I'm Luna Lovegood. I'd say it's nice to meet you, but I'm just here for Harry."

Christ. Harry eyed Luna and shook his head in disbelief. Evidently she was just as good at winning friends and influencing people as in his old universe. Daphne looked contemplative for a moment before figuring it out. "You're Oddment Lovegood's girl, aren't you?" Luna nodded. "No wonder you lack any sort of proper social graces." With that and a final glare in their direction, Daphne slid down the bench to leave a gap between herself and Luna and Harry, pulling a book out of her pocket and restoring it to full size.

Lara quickly claimed the empty spot to stay close to the one person she actually did know, and Su and Hermione exchanged looks before Hermione pulled out a book and they fell into their own private conversation. That left Harry with Lara and a younger version of the girl who'd been close to his only friend after Ginny's death... who might know what he was. Harry wasn't entirely sure on that front. There was one way to find out, though: ask questions. Leaning in, he rested his chin on her shoulder so his lips were near her ear. "What did you mean by hyphenated names, Luna?"

"Silly Harry. You don't need to hide what you are from me." Wrapping her arms around his neck, Luna brought her head up so their foreheads touched and he could stare into her sparkling silver-blue eyes. "It's me."

Eyes widening in disbelief, Harry quickly forced his hope down. Luna was just plain weird and he wasn't going to dismiss the possibility that she was some sort of seer or something and had already Seen them becoming friends and was therefore acting as if it'd already happened. He had to know if she really was HIS Luna. "What did you wear to Slughorn's Christmas party in your fifth year?"

Luna just rolled her eyes before smiling tolerantly at him. "Those spangly silver robes. I didn't wear my regular earrings or necklace and you were disappointed with me because you liked me for me and didn't want me to pretend I was normal just for your sake."

It was her. It was really her. Harry grinned in spite of himself. Sure, she was bizarre beyond belief and had a crush on him that was quite disturbing on occasion, but finally he had someone from his home universe he could talk to. He wouldn't have to keep everything to himself anymore. "How did you get here?"

"You didn't think you could get away from me just by hopping dimensions, did you, Harry?" Luna gave him a wicked grin, using one hand to grab his wrist and lower his hand to rest on her thigh. "Remember that time you found me in your bed wearing nothing but those black panties, Harry?" He nodded woodenly, wanting to pull away but the utter insanity of the situation kept his brain from kicking into gear. "Well, I can't get back into those stores yet, seeing as how I'm young and all, but I have been practicing transfiguration when Daddy's busy at the Quibbler's offices..."

Harry's fingers slid over something soft and silky...

Jerking upright in bed, Harry cried out, whipping his head back and forth wildly. It took him a moment to realize... it was all a dream. There was no sixteen year-old Luna shoved into a prepubescent body trying to do far too mature things to him.

Harry flopped onto his back and shuddered. Ugh. That had to be karma. Then and there he swore to never again employ his Oedipal occlumency defense against Snape, no matter how much the man annoyed him. Not if it meant he was repaid with dreams like that.

Rolling onto his side, Harry closed his eyes and tried both to banish the images of his previous dream from his mind, and get back to sleep.

He was successful at neither.

Staring up at the hourglasses in disgust, Harry shook his head as he took in the loss of points. "One of them was laid up in the hospital wing. How on earth did they manage to lose that many points?"

Hermione shook her head mutely, staring up at the point totals in horror, and neither Su nor Daphne could provide an answer either. A familiar voice from behind, though, came through with the explanation. "That damn fool Longbottom was in the hospital wing getting his wrist healed when Malfoy came in and goaded him into a wizard's duel at midnight. Longbottom said he'd use the youngest Weasley as his second. I'm assuming Neville got Ron to sneak out of the dorms last night and meet up with him so they could go take care of business, then they both got caught."

"I can't believe I slept through Ron sneaking out. Boy's about as sneaky as a drunken giant." Harry turned to face Cordelia, amazed to see that she looked absolutely normal. Wait. There was something off about her that he couldn't put his finger on, but it wasn't a wound. She had no scars that he could see, she moved far too easily for even potion-assisted mobility... either healing magic in this universe was immensely better than what he was familiar with, or the prefect had encountered something in the forbidden corridor other than Fluffy.

Oh Merlin. What if the guardian beast of the Sorcerer's Stone WAS something other than Fluffy? Harry winced at the prospect; they'd only found out the cerberus's weakness through sheer dumb luck. If there was something else up there, he'd have to not only scout out the creature but then research a way to get past it without using

magical brute force and possibly blowing up half the second, third, and fourth floors in the process. He'd been hoping to get in and retrieve the stone himself before Quirrell could make a move, cutting off Neville's need to go in and therefore keeping him from needing to go in and rescue Neville when he inevitably failed at the obstacle course.

Cordelia sighed, shaking her head as she reached up to pull her brown hair back into a thick ponytail. "Well, if you see the little git, tell him that if I catch him trying to sneak out of bed again after curfew, I'm going to start using charms to stick him to the bed. And Merlin forbid he have to go to the loo in the middle of the night."

The mental image made Harry chuckle and he inclined his head. "So noted. But now... I know how Hermione despises anything that gets between her and her food. To breakfast we go." Cordelia waved her own hand to dismiss them and the quartet of first years made their way over to the end of the Gryffindor table. "So, Hermione, ready for training tonight?"

"Hell no." Hermione scowled as she spooned eggs onto her plate before fixing him with a glare. "You could just owl home and get a broom sent up here. There's no way my parents could just run over and grab me one from Diagon Alley or something, if they can even afford it. I mean, we're well off but I didn't even think to check broom prices because I knew I couldn't bring one and..."

Owls hooted overhead and Harry looked up to find two teams of owls hard at work: Hedwig and Silver Star tag-teaming his own Nimbus 2000 from home and a trio of smaller owls grasping a paper-wrapped package as they descended towards the table. "Hermione?" She looked up and he grinned as her eyes widened. "I don't think a broom is going to be a problem."

Hermione jumped up, food forgotten, standing on the bench so she could grab what was obviously a broom as soon as the owls drew close enough. The trio hooted indignantly as their cargo was stolen, buffeting her upside the head with their wings before flying up and out of the hall. Tearing the paper off, she gasped as she dropped back

into her seat, thrusting the broom into Harry's face. "Harry! Look! A Nimbus 2000!"

"Hermione! Look! A Nimbus 2000!" Harry waved his own broom in her face, grinning, until she gave him the two-fingered salute and huffed, dropping the broom on the table. "I know you're excited, but try not to be Malfoy. Yes, you have a broom. So do I. Neither of us is supposed to. So let's have a bit more class than he would, and not make a big deal about it, okay?"

Sighing, Hermione took the broom and slid it off the table to rest between her and Su, Harry moving his to between himself and Daphne. "Fine. But I reserve the right to brag to Malfoy that his stupid stunt got the two of us on the Gryffindor quidditch team."

"Only if I'm there to see his face."

"Deal."

After dinner that evening, the pair retrieved their brooms from their respective dorms and, after saying goodbye to Su and Daphne, made their way down to the pitch. It was just as impressive now as Harry remembered it being every other time he'd visited, with its golden hoops on fifty foot tall poles and stands with seats for hundreds. "Ready, Hermione?"

Hermione huffed, swinging the massive bag she had slung over one shoulder and nailing him square in the back. The impact made him stumble forward, causing her to giggle. "For the tenth time in the last five minutes, yes. Now shut up. The more you ask that, the more nervous I get."

"Exactly." Harry grinned at her as he straightened up. "If you're nervous and end up not flying well, it'll make me look better by comparison." Not that he needed that kind of help; they were both good fliers but he was admittedly the far superior one. Not that a keeper needed to have his level of skill. She'd do perfectly alright in front of the goals with what she already could do on a broom, and would only get better with experience.

Swinging her bag back and forth, Hermione's eyes narrowed. "I see. What a cunning, cunning plan you have there. And what if I knock you out before we get to practice?" To emphasize her threat, Hermione lunged, letting her bag swing forward towards him again.

Harry dodged her second attack and began to walk away quickly, hoping to stay out of the reach of that downright painful bag of hers. "Then you get to explain to Professor McGonagall why her star seeker is in the hospital wing. Either way, I win and you lose." Hermione growled softly and Harry laughed, hauling arse across the lawn towards where six figures were clustered at the base of one of the stands. "C'mon, they're waiting for us."

Unlike in his original timeline, this time the entire existing Gryffindor quidditch team had turned out for his first practice. The Weasley twins didn't look quite as welcoming as he thought they would, but then again he wasn't their little brother's friend this time around. Katie, Angelina, and Alicia seemed more intent on dissecting Hermione with their eyes than paying attention, which was fine with him. Hermione would need to learn to deal with that sort of intent scrutiny before the first time she played for a crowd. And Wood was waiting with the crate full of balls, ready to kick things off. "Right then. I assume you both have enough of an idea that I can skip the basics? Positions, the kinds of balls, common fouls, and so on?"

"Right. If Hermione needs anything explained, she can ask me. Doubt that'll happen, though. She's read a few books and... well, now she's downright scary when it comes to quidditch knowledge." Harry instinctively ducked, letting Hermione's hand fly through the spot his head had just occupied before straightening up again. "Hey, Wood, Hogwarts uses the international standard rulebook, right?"

Wood looked puzzled at the odd question, scratching his head for a moment before nodding. "Best I can tell, yeah. I can ask Madam Hooch if it's really important, Potter. Why?"

Nodding his head towards Hermione, Harry tapped one hand against the top of her bag. "There's another reason I asked the professor if

we could have Hermione as our backup keeper. Hermione, go gear up?"

"Yes, Master. Right away, Master. Would you like some tea and biscuits while I'm at it, Master?" The chasers giggled at Hermione's antics and Harry made a show of tilting his head to the side, pondering it. "If you answer that last question, I will come up into your dorm in the middle of the night and kick you right out of bed onto the stone floor."

Hermione stomped away, unzipping her bag and hands disappearing inside, and Wood let out a low whistle. "She's a feisty one. Some poor boy's going to have his hands full with her in a few years." The others chuckled and watched as Hermione dropped her bag, pulling out a long blue object and pressing it against her left leg as she fiddled with a set of straps. "What's she doing?"

Rubbing his hands together, Harry gestured to his legs. "We wear pads, right? The dragonhide ones, kinda slim?" Oliver nodded. "But in the international rulebook... there's no rules about the pads we wear, other than that they can't be charmed, enchanted, or otherwise modified during the match itself. Those... are muggle field hockey goalie leg guards. I'll bet you my Nimbus that she can take a bludger to the legs with those on and shrug it off."

The Weasley twins perked up at that one. "Deal! Except I don't know..."

"...what the two of us would do..."

"...with only one Nimbus. Care to..."

"...throw hers into the bet too?"

"Considering I like breathing? No. No I don't." The twins looked at Hermione and winced. Even they weren't brave enough to challenge her, it appeared. Harry turned his attention back to Oliver. "And yes I know, leg injuries aren't that big a deal for you. But... she also has a blocker for her arm. One right now, but we can get her a second." He gestured to where Hermione had moved on to what looked like a

glove with part of a leg guard mounted on the back, covering the top of her forearm from elbow to wrist with a wide protective barrier. "There's no rule dictating..."

"...the forearm guards we can wear, as long as they don't have an active enchantment. Bloody hell, how come nobody else has thought of this?" Wood seemed utterly appalled that a pair of first years had come up with something his own quidditch-obsessed mind hadn't. Hermione pulled a last object out of her bag and Oliver groaned. "A helmet. There's no rules against a helmet but most of us don't wear them just... well, because."

Harry nodded and gestured for Wood to step back, leaning down in front of his team captain and opening the chest containing the quidditch balls. After grabbing a beater bat, Harry flicked the restraints off one of the bludgers and got ready. "Yeah, but Hermione doesn't want her frighteningly intelligent brain splattered across the pitch and I can sympathize. Hey, Hermione! Think fast!" Bringing the bat forward, Harry batted the bludger her way.

Shrieking, Hermione brought up her blocker into the path of the bludger... and deflected it up and over her head. The impact forced her back a step and she grunted in either exertion or pain, Harry wasn't sure, but it hadn't snapped her arm like a twig and she was still on her feet. That was good news. Then the ball came back around, nailing her in the back of the head and knocking her off her feet. She lay facedown on the grass for a moment before holding up her right hand. "I'm alright!"

"And that was just proof of concept." Harry lazily batted the oncoming bludger up into the air, away from the rest of the team. "We can get her pads with the outer layer made of dragonhide, which will make the pads even stronger. She'll be unstoppable. And look, Wood. Bludger to the skull and she's still awake. She's got one up on you, eh?"

Eyes wide, Wood looked around at the rest of the team, barely even noticing as Harry batted away the bludger mere moments before it would have nailed him in the face. "If anyone else thinks that was bloody amazing, raise your hand."

Five hands went up.

Joe's Note: Yes, I know the popular spelling is Samhain. Given Hogwarts is in Scotland, I opted to go with the Scottish Gaelic variation. So shoot me. There's this chapter and then we go on to chapter ten, which includes the Gryffindor vs. Slytherin quidditch match. So if you're waiting to see if the sorting hat is right... one more chapter, my friends.

Time passed for Harry just as quickly as the first time around, with lessons and thrice-weekly quidditch practices to attend, and before he knew it two months had passed. As the end of October approached, though, he became aware of a major deviation in the timeline. Instead of the normal Halloween feast, complete with decorations provided by the professors, a contingent of parents lead by his own mother descended on the castle to organize and execute a Samhuinn festival.

It made sense to Harry. His mother was supposedly one of the brightest witches to come through Hogwarts in recent years. It stood to reason that after graduation, even if she did go on to become 'merely' a housewife, she could still produce ripple effects in the time stream. In this case, she'd gathered up the other housewives who had sent their children off to school and putting them to work creating a festival at which all parents could come, visit their children, and meet the teachers responsible for the formative years of said children. Even the muggleborns' parents would be included, thanks to a special run by the Hogwarts Express.

As much as he enjoyed having his family around, the whole thing presented an enormous problem for Harry. Would Quirrell unleash the troll in the dungeons again to cover his move for the Sorcerer's Stone? That wouldn't make any sense; they could simply lock the school down with the residents outside enjoying the festival and he'd either be trapped outside or stuck with the rest of the professors as they tracked down the troll. But then if he let the troll out into the festival goers, people might get hurt... and if Harry had to stop it, he'd reveal himself to far more people than he wanted to.

Sighing, Harry floated over the Hogsmeade train station, watching as a crew laid out an engine and cars for the train that would be running

to London and back. Each piece was hovered and enlarged from a tiny, toy-sized lump of metal into a full-sized version. He noticed two things that stood out to him about the process. First, there were only four cars instead of seven... but if only muggleborns' parents were using it, or perhaps just muggleborns' parents and a few half 'n half couples, they wouldn't need nearly as much seating capacity. Also, the gleaming scarlet steam engine was gone, replaced with a tenderless, boxy green engine. But then again, with fewer cars, it was probably easier to use a smaller engine. Wow, that was actually somewhat logical. Harry hadn't thought the wizarding world capable of such a thing.

He was technically out of bounds at the moment, but Harry knew he wouldn't be losing any points over the matter as his mother was one of those working to ready the train for a historic first mid-term run. Her hair made her easy to spot in the fading light of sunset, a splash of red against green robes. "Alright, I'll start coupling the cars, you lot fire up the Duck and see if we need to make any repairs. The Ministry warned me that it hadn't been used in two decades but SHOULD still work... should being the operative word. Chop chop!" That done, she looked up at him and beckoned, and Harry obediently descended towards her. "So, sweetie, whatever happened to wanting to be more like me than your father?"

Grinning, Harry came in for a landing next to the tracks and hopped off his broom, swinging it up gracefully to rest on one shoulder. "What, I can't play quidditch and be at the top of every class I'm taking at the same time?"

Lily pondered that one for a moment, tapping her finger against her chin. "You know, I'm pretty sure it'd violate some law of reality in the muggle world. Here... who knows?" She shrugged. "Just figured you'd leave it to the quartet when they got here next year."

"Yeah, well, something changed." Looking back and forth to make sure nobody was close by, Harry leaned in and lowered his voice anyways just to be safe. "After getting my new wand... I just seem to take to flying more than I used to." His mother's eyes widened and Harry sighed internally; another half-assed lie bought and another potential problem smoothed over. "I figured I might as well make

Professor McGonagall proud instead of sneaking off to fly on my own to burn off steam."

Ruffling his hair, Lily gave Harry a kiss on the forehead before pulling away. "Well when you put it like that, it actually makes sense. So... don't put it like that anymore. It's bloody odd being outthought by your eleven year-old son."

Harry groaned and tried to bring his hair back into some semblance of... well, it was never orderly but sometimes the disorder had a pattern of it's own. Rather like how he'd known where every last thing in his room was this summer, even when his mother pronounced it a disaster area. "And besides, if you think my situation is odd? My friend Hermione is second or third in every class, reserve keeper, and muggleborn to boot. She didn't come in with the advantage I had from you and Dad, and she's still kicking everyone's arse."

"Language, Harry. And I know. You've written home about her. A lot." Swishing her wand, Lily slowly rolled one of the massive passenger cars back until it coupled with a loud clunk to the one behind it. "Makes me wonder, though, if you're taking after your father in another way..."

Harry didn't quite grasp the insinuation there until his mother winked at him and he blushed. "No!" Definitely not. As much as he'd started to regain some respect for Hermione as a person over these last few months, now that he was back with the girl he remembered instead of the nagging slag of his old universe, he'd... well, he'd sooner date Pansy Parkinson than Hermione. He had nothing against the girl here (quite obviously, given they were friends again), but after how many times he'd walked in on her and Ron shagging... it'd be like getting Malfoy's hand-me-down broom. Sure he could fly it, but did he really want to knowing where it'd been?

Maybe it was irrational of him. Or maybe he'd just been permanently scarred by walking on Ron bugging Hermione in the middle of the heads' common room. Harry wasn't quite sure which.

The outburst earned him a dubious look from his mother, who just smiled and shrugged. "If you say so. Just remember, no matter how

smart you both are, you're still both children and I'm way too young to be a grandmother. Just promise me you won't rush into something you might regr..."

"Gahh!" Harry backed away from his mother, quickly hopping onto his broom. "No! I am NOT having that talk with you. No no no!" Wheeling around, Harry rocketed up the path towards the school, blushing and trying to ignore his mother's loud laughter behind him.

Gnawing idly on a piece of chicken, Harry tried to let his guard down and simply enjoy the evening, basking in the heat of the nearby bonfire and examining the faces glowing in the soft orange light. Daphne was at his side, daintily picking at a plate of food with her fingers while muttering under her breath about how uncivilized it was, while Hermione and Su giggled away on the other side of him.

A few feet away, his father had the complete attention of Hermione's father, gesturing enthusiastically as he described something quidditch-related. Mrs. Granger, his mother, and Mrs. Greengrass were discussing something while Mr. Greengrass sat near his wife, eating and alternating between eyeing his daughter and Harry and glaring at James Potter. The Lis were unfortunately absent from the festivities, out of country on work business according to Su, who didn't seem all too upset about their absence.

All in all, it was the perfect evening... unless you were waiting for a random-yet-not troll attack.

At this point, Harry was almost hoping for a homicidal troll to start causing a ruckus, because he'd been on guard since the elves and organizing parents had hauled out the evening feast onto the lawn and the bonfires had been lit. If he'd wasted all night waiting for something to happen and it didn't... he was going to be severely pissed off.

Daphne opened her mouth, no doubt to remind him that retrieving drinks for one's female companions was the gentlemanly thing to do, when Harry was saved by the bell. Or in this case, the possessed professor. "Troll! In the dungeons! Thought you ought to know..." And

just like the first time around, Quirrell completed his performance by pretending to pass out, although onto the comparatively soft lawn instead of the stone floor of the Great Hall this time.

Like a shot, Dumbledore was up out of the throne-like chair he'd been occupying and gathering the professors to him. Tapping his wand to his throat, he magnified his voice to be heard over the ground. "Please! Do not panic! If there truly is a troll inside the school, there are defenses in place that are capable of containing it until the staff and I can deal with it. Remain outside where it is safe and please try to enjoy the evening while we handle this matter."

"Stay here, Harry!" Harry opened his mouth to protest but his father just waved his hand as he passed, Lily only a step behind. "The school's a big place and Dumbledore's going to need help searching it. We've got to help out. Even though your professors told us you're skilled, you're still just a first year. Stay put where it's safe."

Harry wanted to debate the 'safe' part of remaining out here... tell them that Quirrell being out here made it inherently unsafe... remind them that there were only a few ways into the castle and only one big enough for a troll, meaning it had been intentionally brought in a while ago and not snuck in... but he was only an eleven year-old. He wasn't supposed to know these things, and so bringing them up would bring attention to himself. So instead, Harry just nodded and watched his parents join up with the Longbottoms and a few other auror parents before following the headmaster and professors into the school.

Sighing, Harry sat back for a moment, letting the girls' voices flow over him as they discussed the school's newest resident, before he realized there was something he could do to help out. Harry hopped to his feet, waving his friends off as he made his way towards the 'unconscious' Quirrell. The man was no idiot, and had to have known the headmaster would seal the school's entrances behind him after entering. So... what was his plan?

As he got closer, Harry could hear Quirrell mumbling something under his breath. The bits he could understand made his blood run cold. Something involving... warding? Then Voldemort's agent threw

down a trio of crystals before whipping out his wand and firing off a silent blasting curse, shattering them. Harry came to a stop, trying to figure out what it meant. Hesitantly, he reached out to brush against the wards of Hogwarts... but they were intact. If not those, then what wards was he trying to tear down?

A moment later, Harry got his answer as the ground trembled and new screams broke out from behind him. "Trolls! In the Forbidden Forest!" Shit! Quirrell must have had additional help in the forest, perhaps under some sort of masking or stasis ward to hide them from Dumbledore's near-omniscient scrutiny until just the right moment.

Wait a minute. His friends were sitting between the bonfires and the Forbidden Forest! Harry whirled to see a trio of mountain trolls ambling past Hagrid's hut and up the lawn, heading directly for Hermione, Su, Daphne, and their parents. And with the famous apparition-blocking properties of Hogwarts' wards... they were stuck. Most anyone competent was already in the school chasing the troll that Harry realized then might not even exist, and his peers' parents were already demonstrating the wizarding world's famous selfishness as the feast on the lawn quickly turned into a raging mob as people scrambled over each other to get away.

For fuck's sake. Did he have to do EVERYTHING?

With a flick of his wrist, Harry's wand slid into his hand and began to shift into its axe form. As soon as the transformation was complete, Harry flexed his knees and pushed off the ground, taking to the air to gain speed. He'd never tried casting spells like this, but he'd seen it done in his memories and... well, there was a first time for everything. Landing between the oncoming trolls and his friends', Harry twirled the axe before slashing it in a wide arc in front of his body. "Knūa!"

The wide burst of blue magic caught all three trolls, sending them stumbling back and buying Harry precious seconds to figure out what to do next. Trolls were relatively stubborn beasts who could shrug off a number of common spells... so stunning or putting them to sleep was out. Oh, he could do it with sure brute force of magic, but it would raise too many questions. As it was, he was going to get far too much attention for this. There were probably only a dozen people in the

world capable of stunning a troll on their own, though, and Harry didn't want the distinction of being one of them at the age of eleven.

One of the trolls roared, drawing Harry's attention back to the present as it charged and swung its massive club at him. Harry brought his axe up to block but while the magical properties of his weapon allowed him to pull off the move, he was a four foot eight preteen fighting a twelve-foot tall adult mountain troll and he felt the strain vibrate through his entire body. No, he wouldn't be doing that too many times.

Bending his knees, Harry threw himself into the air again, twisting as he came down to land behind the trolls so he was facing their backs. It was a calculated gamble: the trolls probably weren't smart enough to look behind them for a few seconds, seconds in which they could decide the Grangers or his friends were more interesting prey, but Harry was confident he could keep their attention. "Rīsta! Rīsta! Freccia!"

Deviating out of Old Norse and into Italic base spells was a danger, but hopefully the trolls would block him from sight and there was nobody close enough to hear what he'd just cast. The first slash of his axe sent out a crescent of red magic, creating a great tear in the center troll's flesh, while the repetition of the spell created another to form an X. Harry followed it with an arrow of silver magic that shot into the exposed innards of the troll, burying itself in the troll's spine. The fingers around the troll's massive club went lax as the spinal cord was severed and the troll let out a confused whine as it tipped forward, arms and legs no longer able to respond to the brain's commands.

The two remaining trolls started grunting then and, much to Harry's surprise, actually executed something approaching strategic behavior. One turned back to face him and avenge its fallen compatriot as the other started to stalk the rest of the festivalgoers. Harry's eyes narrowed. He hadn't let Hermione get hurt in the initial timeline, and he'd be damned if he was going to let it happen here. "Freccia incendiare!"

Fire formed along the edge of his axe's head before an arrow erupted, striking the troll in the back. It didn't penetrate, splattering across the beast's flesh in tendrils of orange light, but it was enough to return the troll's attention to him and so that was good enough for Harry. "Hermione! Daphne! Get your parents back!"

Hearing the voice of their friend evidently was enough to finally prod the girls into action as red stunners began to fly from three different points on the lawn, hitting the trolls but not doing anything remotely useful. Huh. Evidently Daphne had been playing teacher when he wasn't around. "Harry! Get out of there!" Hermione's face was screwed up in concentration as she hurled the spell over again with equally lackluster results. "I swear to God if you die and I have to explain to Wood that he needs a new seeker because his old one tried to wrestle three trolls, I'll resurrect you just to kill you again myself!"

No! Damn Gryffindor girls! He was trying to lure the trolls away so he wouldn't kill innocents when he finished the trolls off! Harry groaned; he should have made friends with the Hufflepuffs instead. They'd follow orders AND were smart enough not to make him issue an order like 'get away from the rampaging troll'. "Bloody fucking hell, I'm about to pull down lightning, Hermione! Get your damn parents back unless you want them extra crispy!"

The stunners slackened off as the girls herded their parents back, Su providing a few final shots as she brought up the rear. Harry wasn't paying too much attention, though, funneling his magic into his wand-turned-axe as he fought the very order of nature to bring a storm into existence on a cloudless night. Dark, moisture-heavy clouds began to form overhead under his guidance as wind whipped across the lawn.

Harry let the storm build, growing stronger and stronger under his guidance. It was one of the strangest things he'd ever called upon his magic to do, feeling the will of nature fight against him as he used brute magical force to sculpt and strengthen the unnatural storm that he'd brought into existence. Even for his final battle with Voldemort, he hadn't been forced to create the entire storm himself, the magic of their duel destabilizing the atmosphere around Hogwarts and calling one into existence for him. But trolls were notoriously tough beasts

and he was loathe to underestimate the strength of their skin. So for them, he brought in the big guns. Raising the axe to the sky, he concentrated on what he needed the clouds to provide... and then he struck.

Unlike when he gave Neville and Ollivander a shock, this wasn't a light jolt. At the last second, Harry threw up a shield to protect him as the air was superheated to nearly eighteen thousand degrees by the twin bolts of lightning that lanced down, striking each troll directly. Unfortunately, he couldn't protect himself from the shockwave produced by such sudden superheating and Harry missed the trolls' deaths as he was blown clean off his feet.

Harry quickly brought his flight under control and righted himself in midair, hovering as he stared down at the steaming piles of troll. After a moment, he looked away from his defeated opponents and noticed two things. One was the clump that was his friends and their parents, staring up at him in awe. The other was the headmaster, his professors, and the group that included his parents... standing at the entrance to the school and looking at him with similar expressions.

Bugger.

Hermione watched in shock as her best friend was hustled away by the headmaster and his parents, his mysterious axe still thrown over one shoulder. Harry had flown. Not on a broom or anything, either. He'd just... defied gravity for the hell of it. And brought down three trolls by himself, two by calling down lightning from what had been a cloudless sky. What... how... why..?

A tap on her shoulder made her look back at where her father was staring at the still-smoking troll corpses with awe. "Is that the sort of thing they're going to teach you how to do here? Because if it is..." Hermione held her breath. Their second time into the magical world, and they'd been exposed to a random attack ended by an insanely powerful boy her own age. They weren't going to pull her out, were they? "...we're definitely going to have to talk to your headmaster about making a donation. That was like something out of Lord of the Rings or a comic book. To have my daughter someday able to do the

same thing... that would be amazing!" Her father chuckled and rubbed his hands together. "Too bad we're not allowed to tell people about this. Wonder what Jeff would say if I told him my daughter knew magic. His little cricket-playing ponce of a son wouldn't sound so special anymore, would he?"

God, her parents were so embarrassing sometimes...

Eyeing her robes with disgust, Daphne waved her wand and muttered a few domestic charms to remove the stains and straighten them. Ugh. Thank Merlin she'd actually taken the time to learn a few things that time their house elf got food poisoning from snitching raw shrimp, or else she'd be walking around looking like a slob until she could fetch new robes from the tower.

Then again, if they hadn't been forced to eat with their hands instead of utensils like civilized people, she wouldn't have had to wipe her hands on herself before digging out her wand, and she could have... well, she probably wouldn't have been able to help Harry any more than she had. Which was not at all, if she was honest with herself. That had been amazing. "Father?"

"Yes, sweetie?"

"Start writing that marriage contract."

Muttering under her breath, Su flicked her wand through the four strokes required to form the requisite character for her spell and water flowed from the tip in a wide spray, putting out the smoldering remains of the grass around the troll corpses. And Merlin did she wish she was an air elemental so she could disperse THAT particular stench.

That... had been one of the more unique examples of spellcasting she'd witnessed to date. Oh, she'd seen plenty of elemental magic in her young life and even knew a little bit of it herself, such as the water spell she was using to douse fires at the moment. No, that wasn't what she found intriguing. The fact that Harry could command the elements with merely the power of his mind instead of verbal casting

combined with a wand-drawn honzi like she did, on the other hand, was very interesting to her. It meant he had power. Power that few could claim to have, especially at his age.

Maybe it was time to reevaluate her generally passive attitude around him. For the last two months, she'd generally been shoved off on Hermione while he paired with Daphne. While Su quite enjoyed the muggleborn's presence and the intellectual stimulation of a partner on the same level as her, it also meant she was missing out on a chance to get to know Harry better... and that just wouldn't do.

"Now, I think we all know why we're here..."

Harry looked around, taking in the massive crowd in the headmaster's office. Dumbledore himself was there of course, along with the four heads of house, his parents, the Longbottoms, the Greengrasses, the Grangers, Hermione, Daphne, and Su. So much for keeping the exact details of his secret limited to a select few. When nobody in the crowd answered the headmaster's question, though, Harry took it upon himself to break the ice. "Oh! Is it to sample your candy collection? I hear you're quite an aficionado." Pausing, he grinned and gave Su a thumbs up. "Hey, you were right. That Word-a-Day calendar of yours does come in handy."

That earned him a few snickers, along with an outright laugh from the headmaster. Dumbledore pulled out a tin of lemon drops, offering one to Harry before taking one for himself as well. "Now that we've taken care of that... perhaps you would like to tell us where that most interesting weapon of yours came from, and how you came to defeat three fully-grown mountain trolls?"

"Long story short?" Harry held up the axe, letting it shrink back down into the wand he normally carried. "I'm sure you've all heard stories about Thor and Mjolnir. This is his daughter Þrúðr's wand, Rensaren. It was left with the Ollivander family many centuries ago to wait for a new owner. When I went in for my wand this summer... it picked me."

Frank Longbottom was out of his chair like a shot. "That's a historical magical artifact on the German Ministry's class one returns list. And

all this time it's been sitting in Diagon Alley in a box?" Shaking his head, he reached forward and patted Harry on the head condescendingly before grabbing for the wand. "Well, thank you for finding such an important artifact for us, Potter. I'm sure the Germans will be very grateful."

As soon as the man's fingers curled around Harry's wand, the metal tendrils wrapped around the wood glowed an angry red. With a pain-filled hiss, Longbottom yanked his hand back, glaring at a smirking Harry. "I think you're forgetting whose wand it is, Mister Longbottom. The wizard doesn't choose the wand, the wand chooses the wizard. And it chose me. It stays with me."

"Besides, I bet you wouldn't be all for it to be returned to Germany if your fat lump of a son had Brúðr's wand, now would you?" The Longbottoms' silence was all his father needed, sneering at the pair. "Reminds me, where was our vaunted Boy-Who-Lived during tonight's fun? Oh, that's right, didn't someone find him all the way down in Hogsmeade hiding behind the Three Broomsticks? Couldn't you have at least trained him to run to a floo and summon aurors?"

Holding up one hand, Dumbledore brought the argument to a halt. "Now now. Young Mister Longbottom's actions or lack thereof are not in question at the moment, although perhaps in the future we should consider educating all the students on how to properly handle emergencies. No, I am still quite curious about Harry's victory this evening. While Rensaren was rumored to have many properties... Harry, you're only a first year. While your professors have quite enthusiastically complimented your abilities on several occasions... this is far beyond even NEWT level material. How did you manage such an incredible feat?"

Harry almost resisted the urge... but this was too good an opportunity to pass up. Although the bit about the teachers discussing his abilities was something he filed away for later; evidently, he'd have to start pulling back a bit more. "Why it's quite simple, headmaster." He leaned forward, the aged wizard moving in likewise. Harry lowered his voice to whisper conspiratorially. "Magic."

Half an hour of circular talk later, his friends had been ushered away and taken their parents with them, leaving Harry to keep dancing around the issue with the headmaster, his professors, his parents, and the Longbottoms. After a further hour, they were forced to give up and accept his story: Rensaren's abilities included being sentient enough to guide the owner in protecting him or herself, and had shown him the spells needed to survive his encounter with the three trolls. While they were all worried about a first year possessing an ancient magical artifact with that power, not to mention its storm-calling ability, none of them were capable of touching the wand, nor was Harry keen on surrendering it. When the clock struck midnight, Harry received permission to return to his dorm and took the wand in question with him as he left. Nobody tried to stop him.

Harry found himself whistling merrily as he wandered the corridors back to Gryffindor Tower. Oh, he was sure there would be some sort of fallout from this, but for now... Quirrell was foiled, he'd never even had a chance to move on the Stone, and the man would think twice before making a move around a quantity as unknown as Harry.

The fact that he could now mock Neville about 'bravely' running off to hide in Hogsmeade if the chub bothered him again was only a bonus.

One of the great bonuses of having living parents around, Harry decided upon arriving at the Fat Lady, was that they could override his professors. No visit to Madam Pomfrey for him tonight! Besides, he felt great. Better than great. Well, the blast had left a slight ringing in his ears for a bit and he'd needed a few goblets of water before he felt quite right, but all the diagnostic charms had come back normal and so he was spending the night in his own bed instead of the hospital wing. "Victory."

"I hear you had a great one this even, young Potter. Go right in. Everyone's waiting for you... still." The Fat Lady clucked her tongue as she swung open. "I suppose it's because Professor McGonagall is occupied in the headmaster's office and can't come scold them..."

Harry raised an eyebrow at that before tapping his wand against the top of his head, disillusioning himself. After the meeting in the

headmaster's office, he was really in no mood to lead his peers in circles for another hour or two. So instead, nearly invisible, he clung to the walls and slowly made his way to where his friends were sitting, wanting to see what they were up to before making his way up to bed.

"...so, we're in agreement that Harry is as dim-witted as any other boy, and it's up to us to make sure he doesn't kill himself with some stupid macho stunt?" Hermione looked at Su and then Daphne, both of whom nodded their agreement. "Good. And so, with that in mind, I hereby call the first meeting of Harry's Angels to order."

...well, it was better than SPEW, he supposed. Harry flicked his wand, levitating Su up into the air before depositing her on Hermione's lap, then moving the pair into Su's former spot so he could hop over the back of the couch and drop between them and Daphne. Grinning widely, he dropped the charm hiding him from view and leaned back, stretching his arms out along the back of the couch. "Good evening, angels."

With a synchronized shriek, all three threw themselves at him, latching on and hugging him tight. "Harry!"

"Ack! Air!"

Joe's Note: Before I get any protests from people... straight from Quidditch Through the Ages, the fifth rule of quidditch as established in 1750: "No substitution of players is allowed throughout the game, even if a player is too injured or tired to continue to play, unless there are reserve players present." In Philosopher's/Sorcerer's Stone, it's clearly stated that Alicia Spinnet was a reserve player the year before Harry's arrival to Hogwarts, meaning that the house teams at least occasionally field and utilize reserve players. So what I've done here with Hermione isn't without precedent, nor does it violate canon.

Following his duel with three trolls, Harry noticed everyone looking at him differently. It was to be expected, really; a single troll would be hard for an adult wizard to handle, and he'd taken out three as a first year. Unfortunately, though, Hermione and Daphne had migrated from good friends to the ranks of the 'admiring from a distance' for some reason and Harry found himself with only Su for genuine company.

Not that he minded. He and Su hadn't been as close as they could have been in his original timeline and this time around she was more of Hermione's friend than his, pairing with the muggleborn witch just as he tended to gravitate toward Daphne most of the time. So he decided that as long as people were behaving strangely, he might as well make the best of it and get to know his most enigmatic friend.

His best chance came each morning, as he took to the grounds to take a few laps around the quidditch pitch and Su staked out a spot near the lake for some sort of exercise that Harry vaguely recognized from one of Dudley's martial arts movies. Each time he reached that end of the pitch, he'd get to watch her go through part of the slow, graceful, almost dance-like routine before his path took him around the bend. And while she normally finished before him, waiting until he was done so they could walk back to the school together, Harry decided to push himself that morning so he could be the first one done, trotting down toward the lake to watch.

It was a hell of a view, too, and Harry wasn't looking at the lake or rolling Scottish hills. Su hadn't grown up to become a particularly curvaceous woman and so at eleven, Harry could already see hints of

the gorgeous woman she would someday become. Even if part of the attraction was the 'Cho without the waterworks' factor, she really was quite pretty already. Harry repeatedly had to remind himself that they were both eleven on the outside, and she was on the inside as well.

The overly tight sports bra and shorts of muggle manufacture she wore to exercise in did absolutely nothing to help the matter.

Su finished and stood there motionless for a long minute, her long hair fluttering in the breeze. When she spoke, Harry barely heard it. "You have a question for me."

"Hmm. I guess we'll be signing you up for divination with Professor Trelawney in third year." Su turned her head to the side enough for Harry to see the slight smile on her lips and he pressed on. "You're the only one who doesn't treat me weird after seeing three mountain trolls get fried. Not that I mind... but why?"

The black school robe Su threw on over her exercise clothes for modesty was resting on the ground and Harry bit his lip to avoid making a fool of himself as she bent at the waist to fetch her wand from it, already small shorts stretching tight over her posterior. "You're familiar with Western magic, I presume? Using either a wand movement, an incantation, or both as a focus for your mind? Eventually moving on to silent and essentially still casting?" Harry nodded and Su wagged her wand back and forth. "Eastern magic is the same these days because we had to evolve when you gweilos came knocking. Before that, we used a slightly slower method... but the results were a bit more spectacular. Sadly, grand results don't matter if you get killed before you finish casting and so it's fallen from use. That doesn't mean it's forgotten, though."

Harry scratched his head; he was no slouch mentally but even he had no idea where this was going. "Not that I mind the lecture on international magical history... but what does it have to do with why you're not treating me like Merlin with leprosy?"

"Tut tut, Harry. Don't interrupt the professor while she's teaching. It does tie together... because most of the old magic was elemental magic. While I can't create storms or call lightning..." Su turned to the

lake and used her wand tip to trace two glowing blue symbols in the air. "Cau sei!" Water surged up out of the lake, forming a foot wide pillar that rocketed toward Su until she twisted and jabbed her wand at Harry. The pillar curved smoothly, barely avoiding Su and drenching him instead. Harry sputtered in protest at the cold blast of water, throwing up a wandless shield to deflect it around and past him until she ended the spell. "...I do know a few things about elemental magic."

Looking down at his now thoroughly drenched body, Harry grimaced as he took a step and his sneakers let out a wet squelching noise. "How wonderful. Don't suppose you know any charms to dry my shoes, do you?" Strangely enough, anything beyond a basic warming charm had been too 'normal' for his training and so while he could theoretically overcharge one to take care of business... that might actually boil the flesh off his feet in the process.

"Actually... no. Sorry, can't help you there. Water here, not fire."

"Oh. Fabulous."

As the day of his second first quidditch game dawned cold and clear, Harry tried to summon up some of the nervousness and apprehension he'd had the first time, but it was impossible. This year's Slytherin team was dismal, relying entirely on brute force and causing enough injuries to allow their mediocre players to secure a win. He'd beaten them once already and with far less talent than he had now. This was going to be a cakewalk for him.

That, and he was really looking forward to seeing their secret weapon deployed against the elitist bastards.

Settling in for breakfast that morning with the rest of the quidditch team, Harry and Hermione exchanged little smiles as she plunked herself down next to Katie Bell, Su at her side as always and Daphne at his. To anyone else, it would appear as if Harry's friends were following him as always. If they only knew that Gryffindor now had an eighth man ready to take the field...

Way down the table where the rest of the first years were sitting, Harry could see Neville glaring at him. He just smirked and gave a cheerful wave before getting to work on his breakfast. After all, Merlin only knew how long the game might go and he didn't want to get hungry. But Neville... oh, that was a fun one. Ever since Samhuinn, the fat little bastard had been alternating between kissing his ass and cursing at him for not being friends. With anyone else, Harry would have recommended a St. Mungo's evaluation for some sort of multiple personality problem. In this case... it was pretty much just Neville being Neville as far as he could tell. Spoiled children didn't react well to the real world. Malfoy had been proof enough of that the first time around.

Speaking of Malfoy, he hadn't been half as big a pain in the ass this time around. Apart from a few sneers here and there, the blonde had left him alone ever since the Remembrall incident. Harry attributed that to the fact that, while he was heir to the House of Potter and Harry ignoring him in favor of a muggleborn was a bit of a snub, he wasn't THE Harry Potter and so it wasn't as big a snub. After all, there were other heirs of pureblood families in the school at the moment, a number of them more pure than the Potters. There was only one Boy-Who-Lived.

Finally, game time came and Harry helped sneak Hermione into the changing rooms. Somehow she'd managed to escape notice so far, perhaps because everyone was focused on him being the youngest seeker in a century, and they didn't want to blow the surprise now. Even as the team lined up to take the field, Hermione was left behind to wait for the moment she was needed. "She's all set, right?" Wood looked nervous, idly tracing chaser maneuvers in the air with his fingers. "I mean, I hope we don't need her and all but..."

"Just keep your head in the game, Wood, and we won't have a need for her." Harry looked back and gave Hermione an apologetic smile before returning his gaze to the team's starting keeper. "After all, she only goes in if you get taken out. So as long as you avoid getting killed or something, you don't need to worry about how ready she is or isn't."

Wood nodded absently. "Right. Right." There were a series of increasingly loud cheers as Lee Jordan announced their names and Wood hoisted his broom up onto his shoulder. "Here we go. Good luck, all of you."

As they emerged onto the pitch, Harry looked around. Sadly, the 'Potter for Minister' banner from last time around was missing, but the new additions to the staff's box made it worth it. His parents were there, along with Sirius and Amy, his sisters, and Cassie. Sirius and James had even apparated out to retrieve Hermione's parents that morning, who seemed a bit confused at their inability to locate their daughter but nonetheless enthused.

Just like in all but one of the quidditch games he'd played in so far, Madam Hooch was waiting for them in the middle of the field as the two teams assembled. Her yellow eyes drifted over each of the players before focusing on Marcus Flint. "Now I want a nice fair game, all of you." Harry snorted derisively at that; as if the Slytherin team even knew the meaning of the word. Hooch eyed him for a moment before stepping back toward the ball crate. "Players, mount your brooms."

Hopping onto his Nimbus 2000, Harry hovered a few feet above the grass, twisting back and forth slowly. It still felt odd to be using this instead of his Firebolt, but you had to work with what you were given. Besides, they'd hit the market in two years and he could be back on the familiar broom then. Terence Higgs glared his way and Harry responded by taking a page out of Hermione's book, offering up a two-fingered salute. The pureblood merely looked confused and Harry smirked. Ignorant bastards. Then Hooch's whistle sounded and they were up and off into the air as she hurled the quaffle skyward.

"And the quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of Gryffindor... excellent chaser that girl is, and rather attractive to boot..."

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor."

Harry chuckled as he drifted lazily over the pitch, watching the quaffle fly back and forth. While Luna's commentary had been hilarious to listen to, there was just something about Lee Jordan that nobody could replace and he was glad to have the twins' friend back in the position.

"And she's really belting along up there, makes a neat pass to Alicia Spinnet... a good find of Oliver Wood's, last year only a reserve... back to Johnson and... no, the Slytherins have taken the quaffle! Slytherin Captain Marcus Flint gains the quaffle and off he goes! Flint flying like an eagle up there... he's going to sc... no, stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor keeper Wood! And the Gryffindors take the quaffle. That's chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive around Flint, off up the field and... OUCH! That must have hurt, hit in the back of the shoulder by a bludger. Quaffle taken by the Slytherins... that's Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goals, but he's blocked by a bludger, sent his way by Fred or George Weasley, can't tell which... nice play by the Gryffindor beater at any rate. And Johnson back in possession of the quaffle, a clear field ahead and off she goes... she's really flying... dodges a speeding bludger... the goal posts are ahead... come on now Angelina... keeper Bletchley dives... misses... GRYFFINDOR SCORES!"

Cutting across the field, Harry held out his hand to high five Johnson for her excellent shot before pushing the broom back to top speed as he made a quick circuit of the pitch in search of his prey. Nothing. Not even Fred's wristwatch or something gold in the stands. Hopefully the snitch would make an appearance soon, or he'd be in for a long and boring afternoon...

"Slytherin in possession... Pucey ducks two bludgers as he heads for the goals... wait, here come beaters Derrick and Bole..." Harry cursed loudly as the Slytherin beaters slid into position to intercept the bludgers the Weasley twins had just batted at Pucey, sending them flying back at their opponents. Or in this case, opponent: Wood. "Wood dodges the first bludger and OHH! The second one hits him in the head! Just like his first game a few years ago, keeper Wood has taken a bludger to the skull and appears to be unconscious! And time has been called."

Harry hurtled over to the Gryffindor goal posts, spiraling down toward the ground to land near where Hooch and Pomfrey were looking over the injured Wood. "He's going to be out for a while. Yet another dose of Skele-Grow for that boy, all because of this foolish game. When will you lot learn?" Waving her wand, Pomfrey conjured a stretcher under wood and lifted it into the air, making her way off the pitch.

As the other players touched down behind Harry, Hooch turned her attention their way. "You have no keeper. Play on or forfeit, Gryffindor?"

"We'll take the entirety of our time out, if you don't mind? We have a reserve keeper we can field for the rest of the game." Hooch gave Harry an odd look, turning to the rest of the team for confirmation. When she received nods all around, she nodded her assent before heading back to the middle of the field and waving the Slytherin team down to the ground. Harry turned to his teammates. "Alright, go form up. I'll be back in a minute."

The other four turned to leave but Johnson held a hand up, stopping them as she stared at Harry. "Who died and left you assistant captain? You're the youngest one here. Why do you get to order the rest of us around?"

Harry just shrugged, ticking points off on his fingers. "Simple. My friend, my idea, I can zap you with lightning if you piss me off and most of all... because I just did. Now do you want me to go get Hermione so we can play on or should we forfeit?" He held Angelina's gaze for a moment before she looked away, leading the others off toward Hooch and the Slytherins. "Thought so." Shaking his head, Harry entered the changing room to find Hermione sitting on a bench, adjusting her leg guards. Her hair was already twisted into a braid to make it easier for her to don her headgear. "You ready?"

Snorting, Hermione grabbed the helmet waiting next to her on the bench in one hand and her broom in the other. "Not really. But seeing as how Wood just got himself concussed again... and may I just say that can't be good for his chances at passing the OWLs and NEWTs? No Wood means either I go in or you guys allow the Slytherins free

reign of the goals, and I'd hate to have to face the Weasley twins if it was my fault that happened."

"True enough. Come on, then. No time like the present." Harry gestured to the door and Hermione managed a small smile before leading the way out onto the field. As they made their way over to where the rest of the players were waiting, silence slowly descended on the field. By the time they reached Madam Hooch, Harry could have heard a niffler fart. He grinned. Perfect.

Flint was the first to find his voice, staring at Hermione in horrified awe. "What the bloody fuck?"

That seemed to shake Hooch from her stupor and she shot the Slytherin captain a glare. "Flint! Language!" Turning her gaze to Hermione again, the hard look melted away into utter bafflement again. "Although I have to echo Flint's sentiment, if not in those exact words. What are you wearing, Granger?"

"Pads." Harry snorted in amusement at Hermione's blunt and simple answer. "The international standard rules permit the players to wear one pad on each shin, one pad on each forearm, and a helmet if desired." Hermione tapped her leg guards and blockers for emphasis, drawing attention to the oversized red pads. Each one was Gryffindor red with a golden lion and trim, made of dragonhide over muggle foam padding. She'd had to order a second blocker to replace her goalkeeping glove, but since the quaffle was too big to try and nab in it, that was no loss. They too were red with the golden lion across the piece shielding her arm from harm. Hefting her helmet, Hermione slid it on and stared out at them from between the painted, roaring jaws of a lion. "Unlike the rest of the wizarding world, I'm familiar with the phrase 'think outside the box'. The rules don't regulate the size of, or materials in, a player's pads. So as much fun as being hit with a bludger and getting my skull cracked or a limb broken sounds in theory, I believe I'll be proceeding with my plan to show you lot how us muggles tend goal."

Turning to the staff box, Hooch raised her wand to her temple and fired off a silvery owl that shot across the pitch and up to where the headmaster was sitting. After a moment, his eyes went wide and he

shrugged helplessly before firing a return spell back down to their referee. She eyed Hermione for a moment before sighing. "Dumbledore says the reasoning is sound and the game won't be delayed to appeal to the Department of Magical Games and Sports. Players, mount your brooms."

Flint glared and crossed his arms over his chest. "If she gets to wear that muggle shite, Bletchley gets to wear better pads too!"

Arching one white-blond brow, Hooch eyed the Slytherin keeper. "Do you have something in the equipment shed that he's not already wearing?" The team exchanged looks before Flint shook his head. "Then mount your brooms or you can use up a time out to sit here and keep wasting our time."

"Fucking mudblood trash, polluting our game with her muggle sports shit." Flint threw one leg over his broom and pushed off the ground, hovering a foot or two above the grass. "When we get done with you, you're going to think Wood had it easy."

Hermione paused before dropping her broom, heading for the captain of the Slytherins. "Come down here and say that to my face, you snaggle-toothed bastard. I will fuck your inbred arse the hell up."

Grinning widely and exposing his horribly troll-like teeth, Flint twisted his broom in a quick circle and forcing Hermione to duck to avoid being clipped in the head with his bristles. "Awful lot of bark for such a little bitch, mudblood..."

"Granger, Flint! Language! Granger, get on your broom or get off the field!" Walking over, Harry grabbed the back of Hermione's robes and tugged her back over to her broom before mounting his own. He was eagerly awaiting the impending carnage after that exchange and knew things wouldn't take long to explode. He was proven right almost immediately. As soon as all fourteen players were airborne, Madame Hooch blew into her whistle to resume play... and Hermione rocketed forward on her brand new Nimbus 2000, her right arm shooting out and clotheslining Flint. The Slytherin chaser let out a choked gurgle as his broom continued on without him, sending him

sliding off the back end and dropping a few feet to the grass. "Penalty, Gryffindor! Penalty shot to Slytherin!"

"Sweet Merlin, before the players even make it into the air, new Gryffindor keeper Hermione Granger makes her mark on the game and sends that troll Flint back to the ground! Gryffindor is charged with a penalty, but it's completely worth it in my opinion. Go Granger!"

"JORDAN!"

Making a slow, lazy loop along the edge of the pitch, Hermione pumped her fist in the air a few time and basked in the cheers of her fellow Gryffindors before taking up her position in front of the rings. After a few moments of angry discussion, Flint wrestled the quaffle away from the other two chasers on his team and rose into position to take the team's penalty shot. Without any help from his teammates or interference from bludgers, though, Hermione kept up with him easily and caught the quaffle, hurling it to Johnson before making an obscene gesture to Flint.

Harry was tempted to shout a warning as Flint made a beeline for one of his own beaters, wrestling the bat away, but Hermione had an eye trained on him even as she kept the rest of her attention on the quaffle. "What's this? Evidently Flint's not content at just failing as a captain and chaser today and wants to try his hand at beating..."

"JORDAN!"

"And here comes the bludger... Flint whacks it toward the Gryffindor keeper but Granger seems strangely unconcerned... she's raising one arm and OH! Direct hit!" There was silence until Hermione waved the arm back and forth casually, then wiggled her fingers playfully. "Sweet Merlin, whatever that girl is wearing, she just took a full on bludger hit and doesn't have a scratch to show for it! It may look ugly as sin, but it gets the job done!"

There was a moment of silent and then what sounded distinctly like a slap being magnified by the pitch's magical speaker system. Then Harry groaned as his mother's voice emerged. "Excuse me, young

man, but I helped do the sewing and charms work on those pads. They aren't 'ugly as sin', thank you very much."

Jordan, much to Harry's surprise, found at least one person scary enough to induce an apology. "Oops. Sorry, Mrs. Potter."

Shaking his head, Harry shot off towards where Bell was chasing a Slytherin chaser back down the pitch. Just before he took the shot, she slapped the quaffle away and dove to retrieve it. Harry followed, running along side her before pulling ahead and sliding in front. "Hey, Bell, my broom's faster! It's not blagging if it's your teammate!"

"I hope you know what you're doing, Potter!" Harry grabbed the broom with both hands, hanging on tight as it bucked beneath him, slowing noticeably as his teammate latched on. "Go go go!"

Catching Spinnet and Johnson's attention, Harry wracked his brain before coming up with the signal he'd seen them use in practice and doing his best to mimic it. Evidently he managed it, or close enough, because they fell into position beside him as he accelerated down the field, creating an odd augmented Hawkshead Attacking Formation. While he suffered from the weight of an entire second rider being dragged behind him, it was still faster than Bell could manage on her own and Bletchley was caught off guard as Harry tipped his broom upward, shooting up into the sky as she released him and rocketed beneath, drawing back her arm and hurling the quaffle toward the left ring. It passed through and a tone sounded, signaling another ten points for Gryffindor.

"And Potter taking after his old man..."

"Who the hell are you calling old, whelp?"

"JAMES POTTER!"

"Sorry, Professor."

"...getting in on some wicked chaser action there, helping Gryffindor rack up another ten points. Huh. In the middle of Gryffindor's three lovely chasers. You know, Potter, I had a dream like that once..."

"JORDAN!"

"Moving on..." Harry chuckled and left the chasers to their own devices as he began looking for the snitch for the first time since the game resumed. After a minute or so, though, he realized Higgs was marking him... and that just wouldn't do. Leaning forward, Harry adopted a look of total concentration before diving. "And Potter's seen the snitch!"

Harry bit his lip to avoid smirking as Jordan fueled the exact reaction he'd been hoping for. Higgs gave up even attempting to be subtle (not that he'd been managing it in the least) and sped up, trying to follow as closely as possible so Harry would lead him to the snitch he couldn't yet see. Harry, feeling a bit playful, raced toward Spinnet from behind, coming within inches of her as he rocketed past. Hopefully Higgs wouldn't hit her, but if he did... blatching penalty on Slytherin and a penalty shot for Gryffindor.

Higgs managed to avoid the midair obstacle, though, and Harry decided to try something a bit more challenging. As he headed for the Gryffindor goal posts, Harry raised one arm and tapped it against his chest. Hermione nodded in understanding, leaning back and clenching her thighs around the broomstick as she prepared to do her part. Waiting until he was almost to Hermione, Harry slid a bit to his right and hauled back on the broomstick, hanging on for dear life as the sudden deceleration nearly threw him off. Higgs, left with either trying a hard turn, rise, or dive at top speed or threading the needle between the two, opted for the latter option. It proved to be a mistake when Harry and Hermione each thrust an arm out, hand wrapping around the other's wrist for support as the seeker slammed into them.

"Bloody hell! Higgs gets teamed up on Granger and Potter, getting knocked off his broom and sent flying into the bottom of the center goal. I could hear his head hit that ring from here, folks; that boy isn't getting up anytime soon. No doubt there's going to be a penalty and a free shot for Slytherin, but again... good work Granger and Potter! They may be the newest members of the Gryffindor team but they're certainly going out of their way to make their presence felt!"

In short order Higgs was carted off the field to join Wood in the hospital wing, Flint failed to make another penalty shot, and regular play resumed. Hermione was starting to take more bludger shots than before, though, and so while Harry knew that technically Gryffindor could run the game out indefinitely and rack up an enormous score since only he could end the game, he decided catching the snitch soon would probably be a good idea. The padding would hold up to a great deal of abuse, but why risk the brightest mind of his generation for no good reason?

The game continued on for almost half an hour, the Slytherins scoring once in a while as the Gryffindors ran up a huge lead on their increasingly desperate foes, and the end was almost anticlimactic. Hovering near the Gryffindor goals as he watch Hermione used the quaffle to hit a Slytherin player in the back of the head, Harry almost missed the glint of gold that indicated the snitch. Almost, but not quite. Wheeling around, Harry flattened himself against the broom and took off like a shot, eager to land Gryffindor another hundred and fifty points and end the game.

The snitch drifted close to where Flint was hovering and Harry was momentarily worried the Slytherin chaser would blatching or a snitchnip just to be cruel, but after a long moment, Flint pulled back to give Harry room. Perhaps he wanted to end the humiliation, or perhaps he realized that with Wood in the hospital, the game couldn't be ended through mutual captain consent and it was entirely up to Harry. Whatever the reason, Harry was just glad he wouldn't have to wrestle the brute for the snitch. "GO FOR THE MUDBLOOD!"

Well now. That didn't sound good. Intent on catching the snitch to end the game, though, Harry left Hermione to fend for herself, putting his broom into a steep dive as the snitch plummeted to earth, relying on Jordan's commentary to keep abreast of what was going on. "Derrick and Bole seem to have abandoned the game itself, leaving the bludgers to the Weasley twins as they head for the Gryffindor goals. Potter may be about to catch the snitch, but Flint seems to want to leave a lasting impression on the Gryffindor team by hospitalizing two keepers in one game. I have no idea what Granger's plan is, because she's not making a run for it. Instead, she's pulling the broom upright and if I didn't know any better..."

Harry leaned forward, thrusting his hand out. Three inches away... two inches... one... his fingers curled around the snitch and he pulled up, pumping his hand in the air. "GOT IT!"

"...it is! Granger pulls off a Starfish and Stick but instead of blocking the quaffle, she plants her foot straight into the chest of Derrick! For the third time today, Granger has knocked a Slytherin from the sky and it's not even a penalty because Potter had already nabbed the snitch! A hundred and fifty points for Gryffindor and they win, three hundred and twenty to forty!"

Landing, Harry found himself attacked from both sides as Su and Daphne latched on, delivering rib-cracking hugs before pulling away, Su to do the same to Hermione and Daphne to take his arm in a far more ladylike fashion. "Excellent game, Harry. Although I could have done without that one maneuver you did with Hermione. Both of you could have been thrown from your brooms, and where would Gryffindor have been then?"

Harry chuckled and gave Daphne's arm a squeeze as he led her over to Hermione and Su. "Hermione and I ran through it in practice dozens of times. Wood and the twins charmed a school broom with a dummy to fly into us. We tested it with someone up to Flint's weight. What'd we end up calling it, Hermione? The 'Murderous Muggleborn'? Oh wait, that's what you did to Flint..."

"Hey, why don't we head back up to the castle and play a rousing game of 'Hide and Go Fuck Yourself', Harry?" Hermione thrust her broom out like a lance, jabbing Harry in the chest and sending him stumbling back. "Besides, we agreed. It's the 'Mad Muggleborn', in both the solo and team-up versions."

Before Harry could respond, Hermione was rocked forward by a slap to the back of her head. Behind her was a tall, middle-aged woman with Hermione's trademark wild brown hair. "Language, damnit. We raised you better than this."

From beside his wife, Mr. Granger opened his mouth to comment, closed it, and then shook his head. "I'd remark on the irony of that statement, dear, but it's not worth sleeping on the couch when we get home." Taking Hermione by the shoulder to spin her around, he grabbed her in a bear hug and lifted her off the ground. "That's my girl! Glad to see you didn't take any rubbish from those boys on the field."

"Oof! Put me down! Dad, you're embarrassing me in front of... well, everyone!" Hermione batted helplessly at her father's arms for a moment before he chuckled and released her. She stumbled a bit before regaining her footing, glaring at him as she smoothed down her robes. "Bloody hell, I can't take you two anywhere." Harry couldn't help but laugh at her misfortune and soon her glare was turned on him. "Laugh it up, Harry. Don't look now, but I'm not the only one with parents here today..."

That was all the warning Harry received before being bowled over from behind. "Oh my baby boy, I was so worried about you! And what were you thinking, trying that move with Hermione? You could have gotten yourself killed!"

Hermione snickered.

Harry glared at her, reaching back to pat his mom on the back as she clung to him.

Joe's Note: Let me just say before we get into the chapter... this is not a harem fic. Harry's a teenager or a preteen, depending on whether you're counting mental or physical age, and he's got a wandering eye. He'll be checking out girls here and there, but unlike most authors out there... I realize that doesn't mean he's going to date and/or marry them. Christ, if I married every girl I took a long look at, I'd have the world's biggest polygamist compound all by myself.

Also, note that he doesn't have his cloak anymore... I warned you guys to reread previous chapters when I went back and added further deviation from SilverAegis's work. Harry was sent back while wearing his normal school robes and uniform, and so the only things on him were his wands (both of which he has hidden away at present) and clothes.

In the aftermath of the quidditch game, the school seemingly decided that he was just a normal young wizard, albeit one with a fantastic amount of power, and things largely returned to normal. Now and again Harry caught Hermione giving him a look he couldn't quite decipher, but she and Daphne were back and talking to him like friends instead of fan girls which was all that mattered to him.

November blew past in a flurry of classes, quidditch practices, study sessions, and raids on the kitchen and soon it was December and snow was falling. Ravenclaw defeated Hufflepuff by a narrow margin, putting the teams second and third respectively in the standings for the Quidditch Cup. As Christmas approached, though, Harry realized he had absolutely no idea what was in the Forbidden Corridor this time around. He still maintained that whatever had injured Cordelia wasn't Fluffy, based on how fast she recovered. But if it wasn't the cerberus... what was it?

There was only one person at Hogwarts he knew he'd be able to get an answer from: Hagrid.

And so that's how Harry found himself battling through knee-high snow one afternoon to reach Hagrid's hut, scarf wrapped tight around his neck as he shivered in the fierce cold. As soon as he reached the

front steps, he hammered on the door hard, desperate to get in. Idly, he wondered if Su knew any other elementally inclined students in the school. Maybe Cho... no, she was definitely a water if she had an ability in the elemental arts. Hermione? She definitely had the temperament of a fire. And times like this would definitely make a fire-inclined friend good to have. The door swung open and Harry found himself looking far up into Hagrid's confused face. "Harry Potter? Blimey, I haven' seen yeh since... well, before yer mum an' dad went into hidin' near the end of the last war! Come on in!"

Harry allowed himself to be hustled over to a seat near the fire, taking the large cup of too strong tea that Hagrid gave him. "Err, thanks. No, I just came down because I heard a few students talking about a three-headed dog and... well, you're not the Care of Magical Creatures professor but everyone I asked said you're even better than Kettleburn." Harry grinned and leaned forward. "So, is there a three-headed dog in the school?"

"How'd they find out about Fluffy?"

There was a muffled crash from somewhere in the back room of the hut and Harry whipped out his wand, ready to hex whoever the interloper was. "Rubeus Hagrid!" A disturbingly pale redheaded girl in her late teens, wearing a uniform marked with the yellow and black trim of Hufflepuff, emerged and put her hands on her hips, reminding Harry greatly of Molly Weasley when the twins did something wrong. "Did you or did you not tell me at the end of last year that you'd leave that mutt of yours at home this year? The last thing you need is someone getting bit by one of your pets when you're trying to get Headmaster Dumbledore to give you Kettleburn's job at the end of next year."

Hagrid actually appeared to blush a bit at the rebuke, staring down at his feet as he fidgeted. "Erm, I did leave Fluffy at home, Candace. Hogwarts. This is where I live. I thought ye knew that?"

"I... I... dammit!" Candace stomped across the room, throwing herself down onto the chair next to Harry and crossing her arms over her chest as she sulked. "I can't believe I fell for that one." Suddenly, she jerked upright and rocketed from her chair, spinning in a circle as she

regarded the room with wild eyes. "Wait. If Fluffy's still here... where's that runespoor you promised me you were 'bringing home' last summer?"

Looking nervous, Hagrid whistled softly as he tried to look anywhere but at Candace. Then something black and orange dropped from the rafters of the hut, causing Candace to shriek as it landed on her shoulders, the tail curling around her torso. Three heads turned to stare at her, tongues flicking out to taste the air. § You rang? §

Candace screamed, grabbing the six-foot long snake and hurling it at the wall. "HAGRID!"

The runespoor hit the stone wall near the fireplace with an annoyed hiss, surging away from the roaring fire to a slightly safer spot in the middle of the floor. Then, much to Harry's astonishment, the middle head burst into song. § Alas, my love, you do me wrong, to cast me off discourteously. For I have loved you well and long, delighting in your company. §

Swaying back and forth, the left and right heads joined their brother in song. § Greensleeves was all my joy, greensleeves was my delight. Greensleeves was my heart of gold, and who but my lady greensleeves? §

Harry had to bite his lip to avoid laughing out loud at the runespoor's antics, wondering where it'd picked up a muggle song from. Or maybe it was a song that had originated in the wizarding world and seeped out to the muggle masses? Far too often, he'd assumed some historical figure to be a muggle only to have Hermione inform him otherwise. Actually... did it really matter?

As Hagrid stammered apologies and hustled the three-headed snake from the room, Candace huffed and retook her seat next to Harry, rubbing her hands over her arms and shuddering. "Now that we're done with THAT foolishness... my name's Candace Wiedmaier. Sixth year Hufflepuff. Hagrid's trying to get himself together and apply for Professor Kettleburn's job when he retires, and since I really love magical creatures too, I figured I'd help him out by sharing my class notes, telling him what we did for homework, and so on."

"Wicked." Harry wondered if there'd been a Candace in his own universe that was responsible for Hagrid's ascension to teacher in his third year. Maybe down the road he could get a pensieve and examine his memories of the first two years' mealtimes to see if he could spot her. "So, you don't like the runespoor or Fluffy? Have something against animals with three heads?"

Candace shook her head, waving her wand and summoning a photo off the mantle above the fireplace. In it, Hagrid stood over Fluffy like a proud father, petting the dog's back as the heads took turns licking the face of a laughing Candace. Back then, though, the cerberus had only been slightly bigger than a large muggle dog. "It's nothing against Fluffy, but now that he's huge... he's a risk to the students. I just don't want anyone to get hurt. Then again, I'd take Fluffy over that runespoor of his. At least you can calm Fluffy down with some music. That runespoor is just plain dangerous. If you get bit by the right head... well, your head of house is going to be writing a letter to give your parents their condolences."

Hmmm. As funny as a snake that could keep itself company sounded for a pet... he probably wouldn't be able to convince his parents to let him buy one if they were that poisonous. Drat. Harry nodded, giving an exaggerated wince as well. "Yeah, I can see why you might not like the runespoor. So what about Fluffy? Where do you get a three-headed dog from, anyways? Duplication charm gone horribly wrong? Transfiguration homework of yours that you got a Troll on?"

"I bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year." Hagrid emerged from the other room, short one runespoor. "I was goin' to sell him off to be a guard at a magical animal reserve, but Dumbledore wanted me to keep him around in case we needed a new guard for..." He trailed off and winced. "Never you mind."

Leaning over, Candace nudged Harry in the ribs. "That's about as far as I've heard him go. One time, he mentioned someone named Nicholas Flammel. It's all terribly mysterious. Makes me want to go up to that corridor and see what Fluffy's guarding, now that they replaced whatever attacked Cordelia Cram with a beast I know how to get past."

Harry nodded, finding himself with a lot of answers to his questions. Fluffy was the second guardian; Cordelia gone up against something else and been hospitalized... probably obliterated so she couldn't share tales of her encounter, too. But if Fluffy was there now and had the same weakness as his universe's Fluffy, he was all set. Idly, he wished Lara was already at Hogwarts. It would have been interesting to pit her... unique talents... against Fluffy.

"Tempus!" Smoke emerged from the end of his wand, curling to form the time. Harry gave another overdone wince and set his cup of tea down, making a show of adjusting his hat and scarf. "Well, I need to get up to the library. Promised Su and Hermione I'd go over this week's transfiguration assignments with them. Hagrid, Candace, if you want to use me as a test student, I'd love to come hear about magical creatures some time. Just send an owl up to the castle."

As he hurried out the door, mind buzzing with plans regarding Quirrell and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry winced as Candace's voice reached his ears. "You may have a good reason for Fluffy, Hagrid, but what's your excuse for that damned runespoor still being around?"

Poor Hagrid.

On the list to go home for the holidays this time around, Harry found himself sneaking out of Gryffindor Tower one night to complete something he'd originally done a week or so later. Without his invisibility cloak, he had a bit harder of a time of things, but he still knew the school better than anyone alive short of the headmaster and he easily reached the room housing the Mirror of Erised without being caught. Even if he didn't find it, the mirror would inevitably be moved to become part of the Stone's defenses and Harry found himself quite curious about what he'd see reflecting this time around, now that his parents were still alive.

Stepping in front of the mirror, Harry took a deep breath and slowly lowered the intricate mental shields that kept him protected from outside intrusions. As the layers fell away one by one, an image gradually appeared in the mirror, growing more and more distinct as

he revealed more of his mind to the magical artifact. Then the last barrier dropped, and Harry stared at the result.

A version of himself in his late teens was sitting on a throne-like chair, Voldemort's decapitated head resting on one knee. Behind him, Daphne stood with her hands on his shoulders, Su and Hermione on either side of the blonde and reaching across behind her to... well, given that Daphne snapped at anyone but him who tried to touch her, they were likely holding each others' hand. Luna and Lara were kneeling at his feet, the former holding Mjolnir while the latter was waving Rensaren back and forth curiously, only to receive a little nudge from future-him's foot every time she got too carried away.

Moving closer, Harry studied the odd apparition, wishing he was dealing with a pensieve instead of a magical mirror so he could walk all the way around the odd tableau and examine it from all sides. Defeating Voldemort... that was a clear and understandable desire. No Voldemort, no dead loved ones. Daphne... she was a bit of a surprise, but not too out there for him. They'd been friendly in his original universe, this Daphne seemed set on courting him, and because he knew what a beautiful and intelligent woman the girl would grow up to be, he was pretty tempted to let her. And it was also understandable that he'd want Hermione and Su to still be a part of his life; after Ron's betrayal post-Voldemort in his native universe, he definitely would prefer not to go through something similar here.

The clasped hands, or at least what he assumed were clasped hands, were interesting though. Harry's brow furrowed as he thought about the last four months, and how many times it ended up being him and Daphne while Hermione and Su paired up, for class work, homework, studying, and general social time.

No... way...

Merlin, his subconscious was perverted. Then again, given what had happened to his friendship with her when Ron entered the picture, maybe he secretly considered Su to be less of a threat to he and Hermione staying close?

Or he just had a perverted subconscious. Whichever.

The perverted subconscious idea gained another point in its favor when Luna leaned over, rubbing her cheek against his older self's knee. A hand came down to run through her hair and her silvery eyes closed as she leaned into the touch. Lara winked up at him, leaning forward to give him a magnificent view down the front of her shirt. Mirror Daphne was evidently possessive of all forms of him, though, and whipped her wand back and forth quickly, tracing some glowing green Chinese symbols in the air. Lara's hair abruptly turned into a writhing mass of green snakes and she screamed soundlessly, batting at her hair until Harry sighed and mouthed something. The snakes all calmed, turning to look at him and he waved his wand to reverse the transfiguration before grinning at the real Harry.

So he wanted to defeat Voldemort, then live a happy life surrounded by hot female friends. Harry grinned right back at his 'future' self as he began to reconstruct his occlumency shields, the image in the mirror fading away. Yeah, that sounded about right. After all, what was a good life without good scenery? Not that he had anything against ugly girls... well, he disliked Millicent Bulstrode and Pansy Parkinson, but very little of that had to do with their appearance...

He didn't return to the Mirror of Erised again after that first night.

When classes finally let out for Christmas, Harry found himself joining his friends on the Hogwarts Express despite his wishes. While some of his powers were out in the open now, as enjoyable as staying at the far quieter and less cramped school for a few hours and then teleporting to London sounded, he wanted to keep at least a little something in reserve. Maybe he'd have a little fun and dive off the train a bit outside of town and fly the rest of the way to King's Cross.

So instead of enjoying a bit of alone time in Gryffindor Tower with nobody to bother him, Harry found himself in a compartment on the train as it chugged towards London. Thankfully the company was good, as Su and Hermione got in some last minute transfiguration practical work before the latter returned to a house targeted by a Ministry sensor and Daphne seemed content to just spend time with him, absent-mindedly pitching in a piece of advice here or there.

Looking down at the blonde head resting on his shoulder, Harry smirked. He'd heard the comment regarding wedding contracts as he'd passed her by the night of the troll attacks, and was fairly certain that her recent behavior was her way of marking her territory until the contract was finished and presented.

Not that he minded having his friend back after the period of weirdness directly after the attack and, well, it kept the other girls away. Harry had noticed girls ranging from first year all the way up to seventh eyeing him and quite frankly, it creeped him out. Especially since while he did know most of them from his past life experience, most of them hadn't even talked to him so far in this one. Daphne made an effective shield, being from a prominent pureblood family ranking just shy of the Malfoys in the grand scheme of things. And the reputation she'd gained for hexing Neville her first night at Hogwarts certainly helped matters.

Honestly, though, she was a bit of a mystery to him. Every time Harry thought he had Daphne figured out, she went and did something that reminded him that girls were a breed of creature more bizarre than anything Hagrid brought to class. She'd been downright hostile to Neville and then latched on to Harry despite assertions she wasn't looking for something YET, ranged from politely affectionate in public to downright cuddly in private... maybe she figured that since he was a decent boy from a prominent pureblood family, she could likewise use him as a shield and count on him not to take advantage of their closeness? It made his head hurt sometimes. Not quite as much as his old curse scar, but close.

Thankfully, the universe picked that moment to provide Harry with something to distract him from the Daphne issue, in the form of Longbottom and friends invading his compartment. "Potter."

"Wow, after four months sharing a dorm, you know what my last name is." Harry gave a mocking little clap at that. "Congratulations. I'm sure we'll have you remembering my entire name by the end of the year."

Longbottom bristled a bit at the condescending tone in Harry's voice, as well as the giggles that came from the girls in the compartment. "Listen, Potter, you've shown that maybe you're not as useless as I thought. So I figured I'd give you another chance." Stepping further into the compartment, he put himself between Harry and Su and Hermione, holding out his hand. "I'm feeling generous, so I'll even let you bring Daphne along even though she had the bad taste to choose your friendship over mine. All you need to do is stop hanging out with these two losers."

The mention of her name had Daphne stirring but Harry squeezed the arm around her waist in warning before slowly rising from his seat, watching Longbottom scramble backward. "Unless you want Pomfrey to have to make another visit to the Express to fix you up, Longbottom, I strongly suggest you get the hell out of here." Harry took a step toward the Boy-Who-Lived, but surprisingly enough his opponent held his ground. "Now. Or do you want to see if you do any better against me than an adult mountain troll?"

"What are you going to do, try and zap me with real lightning? Please, Potter. The Ministry would have you carted off to Azkaban before you even had a chance to blink. After all, I'm the Boy-Who-Lived." Longbottom grinned widely, spreading his arms out away from his body. "Go ahead. Try your luck."

Harry pondered the invitation, before deciding to accept it. After all, maybe another round of 'Abuse the Wanker' might encourage Longbottom to seek entertainment elsewhere in the future. Surging forward, Harry wrapped his arm around Longbottom's throat, twisting so the pudgy boy was forced to turn and present his front to Hermione. The muggleborn was waiting, planting her fist in Longbottom's gut before bringing her knee up roughly into his crotch. Harry let go as the Boy-Who-Lived wheezed and tipped over, curling into a ball with his hands over his privates. "Hmm. That was pretty lucky, eh?"

Snorting in laughter, Hermione settled back into her seat and grabbed the book she'd set down between her and Su upon Neville's entry. "You don't need luck to beat Neville Longbottom. I'd say all you need

is a pulse, but I'm pretty sure zombies and vampires would be able to take him too."

"True, true." Harry retook his seat next to Daphne, eyeing the trio of shocked boys in the doorway. "Well? You're his minions. Make yourselves useful and drag him out of here. Especially with how hard Hermione hit him in the stomach; he's probably going to puke any minute now and I don't want that stench in here." The trio glared at him but got to work, Dean and Seamus each grabbing under one of Longbottom's arms as Ron grabbed the feet. "Good boys." Drawing his wand, Harry closed the door behind them and locked it before returning his attention to his friends. "So, who's doing what for the holidays?"

Su and Daphne seemed a bit ill at ease after the casual display of muggle violence from Harry and Hermione, with Su recovering first. "I know I'll be portkeying to Hong Kong for a few days to spend time with my relatives. Most of the family holds dual citizenship but lives there for tax reasons. I'll be back in the country on the 30th, though, if you want to get together for New Years?"

"I'll be at home for the entire holidays, but maybe we can meet there for New Year's?" Daphne pointed at each of them as she went around the compartment. "Su, I doubt your parents want people storming the house right after they get back from vacation. Hermione, no offense, but you're a muggle. Getting there and back would be hard for Su and I because you're not on the floo network. Harry, you have siblings. Well, I have one, but you have a two, so I'm the lesser evil."

Made sense to him. Harry knew he'd have a lot more fun without having to worry about Jasmine or Rose wandering in to bug him or, even worse, his mother blowing something up in the kitchen and requiring assistance. The logic was sound, but it wasn't entirely his decision. "Well, it sounds like a good idea to me. Su? Hermione?"

Su shrugged and turned toward Hermione. "Up to you. Daphne's right, I don't think my parents would take too kindly to me throwing even a small party right after we get back into England."

"Why's everyone looking at me?" Hermione pointed back at Harry. "I'm at your house from Boxing Day until we go back to school. My parents are coming over for New Year's Eve, but I'm sure they'd rather talk with your parents than baby-sit me, so they probably won't mind if I'm at Daphne's with you."

Harry blinked and sat up a bit straighter at that bit of information. "Wait, what? When did that happen?"

Sighing, Hermione slouched a bit in her seat so she could kick him in the shin. "I knew you weren't actually paying attention to me when I spoke. I told you about that the night my new quidditch pads arrived... and after the game... and the day we had to put our names on the list to go home... and last night..."

"Oh. That'll teach me to just assume you're lecturing and tune you out." Harry grinned and dodged another kick, trapping Hermione's foot with his legs. "So, not that I mind or anything, but why are you moving in for most of the hols?"

Hermione scowled and tugged, trying to free her foot. "I should just leave you wondering, seeing as how I told you that four times already too. But, since I'm feeling generous, I'll tell you a fifth time. When your mother was helping make my pads, Jasmine asked me if I'd come over and let her try her hand at chaser against me sometime. Since your family was covering the materials and your mum was doing all the work, I felt a bit guilty and figured it was the least I could do. Then your mom went and asked if I wanted to come over for part of the Christmas hols, Jasmine looked really excited at the prospect of getting to fly against me sooner rather than later, and so I agreed."

That was odd. As best Harry remembered from his original self's journal, he was the only one of the three children who took after his father and had an interest in flying or sports. So where had Jasmine's sudden interest in quidditch come from? Harry made a mental note to ask her about it when he got home, as soon as he could figure out a way to do so without making it sound like an accusation. After all, maybe seeing her big brother play looked more fun than seeing professionals play and this was some normal big brother/little sister thing he had missed out on the first time around. Problem for later,

though. "Alrighty then. Party at Daphne's house." Harry looked down at his blonde limpet. "Assuming your family won't mind, of course."

Daphne grinned up at him in a way that sent shivers down his spine. "Oh, I'm certain they'll approve. After all, Mummy and Daddy are quite interested in meeting you."

Well. That was ominous.

"Harry!" Harry spun around to find a familiar head of red hair cutting through the crowd toward him. His mother looked a bit harried, wrapping an arm around him even as her wand blurred into motion, shrinking his trunk and summoning it before tucking it away into a pocket of her muggle jeans. "Listen, I don't know what you did and I don't want to hear about it now. But unless you want a public scene with the Longbottoms, we need to get out of here, now."

Harry rolled his eyes but allowed himself to be pulled away, waving to his friends. "I'll owl you guys!" They waved back and then Harry turned forward to keep from tripping over something as he was dragged along. "I don't suppose you have a portkey to get us out of here, do you?"

Shaking her head, Lily continued to guide him toward the end of the platform and the complex web of rail lines beyond. "Sorry, sweetie, we were supposed to go by floo but the Longbottoms were between where I found you and the fireplaces. I know you hate it, but I'm going to have to side-along you back to the house."

Like hell she was. If there was one thing Harry hated more than getting dropped on his ass by a portkey trip, it was being dragged through apparition by someone else. So much for his desire to keep this particular ability hidden. "Or we could take the Rensaren Express home." His mother gave him an odd look and Harry flicked his wrist, wand dropping into his hand and quickly reforming into an axe. He waited until they were on the very edge of the platform, not out of concern for the anti-apparition wards but out of a desire not to put a lightning bolt through the roof of the station, before pulling his mom in for a one-armed hug. "Hang on."

"Harry, what are you..." Harry thrust Rensaren into the air, feeling the tingling wash over him as his body turned into electricity and shot up into the air, twisting through the sky before slamming back to earth in Godric's Hollow, depositing he and his mother in the front yard. "...going to do?" She looked around incredulously, spinning in a quick circle before turning to Harry. "How did you..?"

Grinning, Harry held up his axe before reshaping it into a wand and tucking it away. "Magic."

Lily narrowed her eyes. "Either we're going to sit down in the kitchen and you can tell me why Frank Longbottom was talking about having you put in a holding cell for assaulting his son while I glare at you... or we're going to sit down in the kitchen and have a nice long talk about your wand over hot chocolate and biscuits and I'll let you and your father handle the Longbottom issue."

"You know, I am in the mood for some hot chocolate..."

By the time James was done at work and had returned home, it was time for a slightly late dinner and the impending scolding was put on hold for the delicious meal of roast chicken, potatoes, and mixed vegetables that Harry and his mother had put together for the family. In the end, the inevitable had to come to pass and Harry found himself escorted into his father's study.

"Now, I know you think you know why you're in here... but you're probably wrong." Harry opened his mouth but his father held a hand up to stall him. "One of the other aurors who was dragged along by the Longbottoms as security for their son came and got me when Frank started going off, and we got statements from your friends. You'll need to come in tomorrow and talk to one of the aurors, but you're not in trouble at the moment."

Oh. Harry blinked stupidly. That was unexpected. Well then, if he wasn't in trouble... "Why did you need to talk to me, then?"

His father sighed, opening one of his desk's drawers and pulling out three thick letters. Removing his glasses, James rubbed the bridge of

his nose for a moment. "As someone who torched a half-dozen wedding contracts to be with your mother and thinks they're insane and antiquated... this bothers me greatly. As a red-blooded male familiar with the mothers these girls might grow up to look like..." He perked up, holding the envelopes out. "Way to go, Harry! Three girls offering themselves up before the end of your first year! I didn't get my first formal offer until fourth year."

Paling, Harry stared at the three letters as if they'd bite him. When his father thrust them his way again, he took them and turned each over, finding nothing other than his name and address on the front. He was rather familiar with marriage contracts from his old world and it was nice to see some things didn't change; he'd need to open each and read the first paragraph of the contract to see who was being sent his way by overambitious parents.

Taking a deep breath, Harry opened the first and pulled out the letter, unfolding it and skimming through the fairly standardized opening language until he found the name he was looking for: Daphne Greengrass. Okay, he'd known that one was coming eventually. So really no surprise there. After all, he'd actually heard her tell her father to send the contract his way. But she was one girl. Who were the other two from?

Harry stuffed Daphne's contract back into the envelope and set it aside, staring at the other two suspiciously. Neither had any sort of curse or hex on it, though, so they were theoretically safe enough to open. Picking one of the two at random, he opened it and scanned to see who sent it. Blaise Zabini? Oh wait, he was a she here and so that wasn't quite as disturbing as his first reaction. Still. Dear God. He didn't even know her. Grabbing the other letter, Harry tore it open. What was next? Pansy Parkinson? Romilda Vane? Both Patil twins?

The answer ended up being one of the few that he didn't guess: Luna Lovegood.

What the bloody hell?

Joe's Note: One thing I felt was weird about SilverAegis's version of this was Harry turning into Santa Claus when it came to his siblings. Granted I was an only child, but most of my friends confirm my belief that when they were his age and on an allowance, parents got something but siblings did not because of monetary restrictions (or more accurately, "it's MY money, why should I spend it on them?"). Granted Harry can pull gifts out of essentially nowhere, but it'd raise eyebrows especially in an eleven year-old (from a behavioral standpoint, not even a financial one).

Also, if you want to PM me to continue a line of discussion from one of my review replies... for the love of God, people, make sure you have PMs enabled on your profile. I can't respond if you don't.

Stepping out of Twilfit and Tattings, Harry pocketed the shrunken package containing Daphne's new winter cloak (blue, to match her eyes) and mentally checked off another person on his Christmas shopping list. His parents were done, as were Hermione, Su, and Daphne. He doubted he was supposed to get stuff for his sisters, since his parents would take care of appeasing them, so that just left Luna.

Harry looked around his end of the alley and, spotting nothing more than Ollivander's and the junk shop nearby, decided to double back down Diagon Alley to see if anything else caught his attention. As he passed Gringotts, the Longbottoms emerged, Frank halting and pinning Harry with a fierce glare as Alice yanked their son behind her. Harry raised an eyebrow; did they think he would attack the Boy-Who-Lived out here in broad daylight just for sport? They'd witnessed his questioning this morning for the aurors and read the statements from his friends. As long as their chubby wanker of a son didn't start problems, Harry wouldn't end them. Rolling his eyes, he turned away and made his way through the crowd toward where he promised to meet his mother. She was waiting for him, a warming charm having removed the snow and chill from the seat in front of Fortescue's as she sat reading a book. "Done, sweetie?"

"All but one. Luna Lovegood." Harry sighed and ran a hand through his hair. After meeting an athletic Hermione, a female Blaise, and

numerous other people who weren't quite what he remembered, he wasn't willing to assume he 'knew' Luna at all. So, if he was treating her as an unknown... "How am I supposed to buy a present for somebody I've never met and know nothing about?"

Closing her book, Lily rose to her feet and rolled her shoulders, letting out a truly disturbing cracking noise. Harry shuddered; were humans supposed to be capable of those sorts of sounds? If that's what getting old meant, maybe he'd try to send himself back again in his mid-twenties or so. "Are you sure you want to get her something? After all, you're going over there to return the contract, not accept it."

Harry nodded, turning and heading toward Flourish and Blott's as his mother fell into step beside him. When in doubt, seek out books. While there likely wasn't a book to help with this situation, there was probably a book Luna would like. "I'm going to be spending six years at Hogwarts with her. The last thing I need is her feeling slighted and bitter about being rejected, and turning into a female Neville on me."

That was rather unlikely given how mellow Luna was, but Harry thought it sounded like a believable enough excuse. Unsaid but at the forefront of his mind was their past life together; he didn't want to alienate someone who'd become such a good friend and ally in his old world and likely would become the same again in this one if he didn't manage to bollocks things up by doing something stupid.

"Makes sense. Alright, I haven't seen Luna since back when Selene Lovegood was still stuck pushing a pram everywhere so I'm no help there." Lily pondered for a moment before pointing towards the charms section. "Selene, though, has always been into charms and DADA magic... that might have rubbed off on Luna. Or if Luna takes after her father Oddment..."

Just like every other time, Harry couldn't help the chuckle that emerged when he heard the first name of Luna's father. "Oddment?"

Lily's lips quirked up. "His friends call him Odd. So do the rest of us. Odd runs a newspaper called The Quibbler. It's... well, a bit wild. Still, she might be into journalism or creative writing so a book about one of those subjects or even some quills and ink might be good gifts.

Other than that, I'm running out of ideas, Harry. I may be a woman, but that doesn't mean I have a telepathic link to every other woman on Earth. Speaking of women, though, what are you going to do about the Zabinis? Present for Blaise as well?"

"I don't need to make a special trip for Blaise, because she's already at school with me. Besides, I can approach her without worrying about scheming parents there. See if I can get her to loosen up and give me some real answers, not whatever her parents have programmed her to say." Flipping through a book quickly, Harry dismissed it and looked around before realizing that the magical bookstore didn't really have anything approaching the second of his mother's three suggestions. Writing was probably an apprenticeship or natural talent profession in the wizarding world, so why would they sell books about it to the common man? He sighed. That made things more complicated, because it was the best idea he'd heard so far. "Can we convert a few galleons and go out onto Charing Cross Road? I want to find a muggle bookstore."

Eyes lighting up, Lily nodded and grabbed him by the hand, hustling him out of Flourish and Blott's. "I haven't been shopping in a muggle store in years. I always had to drag your father and now with you kids along, I've always had to worry about you saying something wrong and attracting attention." She looked him over with a critical eye before nodding. "You look close enough to pass. Let's get some pounds and I'll show you where this great little shop is..."

When Christmas morning dawned, Harry was more excited than he'd ever been before for the holiday. The closest he'd ever come to a real celebration was in his fifth year, at Grimmauld Place with Sirius and the Weasleys, but now he had his parents, sisters, Remus, and Sirius and his family to celebrate it with. Being included by the Weasleys was all well and good, but it never really made up for his lack of true family... and the more he experienced in this world, the more he became aware of that.

For once he woke up without the assistance of his alarm clock, having not set it the night before. Honestly, Harry had expected his sisters to come and pry him out of bed far before... he stared blearily

at the clock before finding his glasses and slipping them on. Wow. He'd made it all the way to nine 'o clock? That was impressive for Christmas Day. Was something wrong?

Harry slid out of bed, hissing a bit in displeasure as his feet hit the cold wooden floors and twisting back and forth to loosen up his back. Then he stopped and let out a rueful chuckle. There'd be no run today, either around the lake at school or around Godric's Hollow. Christmas and all. So instead he tugged on his wand holster, Brúðr's wand popping out long enough to cast a low-powered warming charm over his body so he wouldn't need slippers or heavier clothing around the house. Time to go investigate the rest of his family.

His first stop was Rose's room, where he stopped in the doorway and chuckled. The poor girl had fallen asleep sitting up leaning against the window while waiting for Father Christmas and was more than likely going to wake up with a hell of a pain in her neck... and with her cheek frozen to the window pane. Harry carefully crept across the room, using another low-powered warming charm on the glass to slowly heat it to room temperature before moving off to check on Jasmine.

Neither of his sisters had made it to bed, Harry discovered upon entering Jasmine's room. Unlike Rose, though, Jasmine's pose was something straight out of his memories of Hermione: face down on a desk with a quill still in hand. Harry carefully took it from her to keep her from scratching or drawing on herself if she twitched in her sleep and was about to move off again when a name caught his eye and brought him to a stop. Hermione? The desk was practically covered in letters in her familiar scrawl and Jasmine had fallen asleep in the middle of a new letter to his teammate. Hmm. That shined a whole new light on the quidditch question. Did Jasmine have an interest in quidditch because she wanted to be like Hermione, or an interest in Hermione because of quidditch?

None of his business, he decided. Harry made his way out of his sister's room and headed downstairs, wandering into the cold and quiet kitchen. After getting a fire going in the empty stone fireplace, he decided to do his parents a favor and got to work cooking breakfast without waiting for his mother to join him. Seeing as it was

Christmas morning and he was feeling generous, he decided to put together the full English for his family: eggs, bacon, sausage, fried bread, baked beans, and mushrooms. Not that he'd be having any of the mushrooms... eyeing them distrustfully, Harry poked them with a spoon as they sizzled in the pan. No fungus was going into his body, thank you very much.

The first sign of an awake parent came nearly half an hour later when a thump and the scrape of a chair heralded the arrival of his mother as she stumbled into it, wandering blearily towards the counter. "Coffee..." Harry rolled his eyes and snickered, but dutifully poured a mug for his mother and handed it to you. "Thank you, sweetie."

"If I hadn't spent eleven years freeloading, I'd be talking about charging for this kind of service, you know." Harry flicked his wand, amused to see that his mother still instinctively opened her mouth to chastise him before shutting it, and levitated the platters of prepared food toward the kitchen table. "Is Dad coming down or are we starting without him?"

Shrugging, Lily pulled out her wand and tapped her throat before turning her away from him. "JAMES!" Harry winced, clapping his hands over his ears as his mother's supercharged voice boomed through the house. "GET DOWN HERE NOW AND EAT SOME BREAKFAST OR I'LL LET THE KIDS EAT IT ALL!"

Harry groaned and threw himself into the chair beside his mother, poking her in the ribs with his wand before putting it away. "Thanks, Mum. I couldn't have done that myself." A moment later, his father came stampeding down the hall with his sisters in hot pursuit. James easily entered the kitchen, but a Potter pile-up occurred as Jasmine and Rose ran into Harry's barrier. He'd set up the barrier earlier using a weaker variant of the infamous Age Line, mostly to keep the girls from sneaking in and picking at the food before it was done and set out for the family. "Erm, oops. I should probably take that down, huh?"

"I don't know." Grinning, his father started to pile food onto his plate, eyeing the duo stuck on the other side of a lightly glowing blue barrier.

"Could be nice to have a breakfast without Lily making me give up all the choice pieces of bacon..."

Chuckling, Harry pulled his wand out again and waved it at the door. "Actually, Mum uses a Switching Spell to put the good bacon back on your plate before everyone digs in. You're just too busy whining to notice." As his sisters took their seats and began serving themselves, he pointed his wand across the table and waggled it at them. "You two are on dish duty, by the way?"

Rose pouted, looking to their parents for help before turning back to Harry. "Me? What did I do to deserve that? And you're not the boss of us anyways!"

"I had to come unfreeze your cheek from the window before you woke up because you fell asleep there and Jasmine, I had to take a quill out of your hand this morning or you would have woken up with streaks on your face." Harry tucked his wand back into its holster and then pointed over at the heaping pile of pots and pans in the sink. "It means you two owe me and since mom and I cook for you all the time and she does the dishes most days, you can do them once for her."

Lily grinned and raised her mug in approval. "And I'm the boss of you two and I heartily endorse this idea. No chores, at least for the morning? Happy Christmas to me!"

An hour later, breakfast was gone, the twins had grumbled her way through most of the cleaning, and the family adjourned to the sitting room to open presents. Almost right on cue, the fireplace flared green and the Blacks came piling out, followed by Remus. There was a bit of laughter as poor Cassie came rocketing out like a brown-haired torpedo, mowing down Harry and sending them to the floor in a tangle of limbs. The blushing pair got themselves sorted out in short order and James and Sirius began passing out presents to their proper recipients as the extended family settled in around the Christmas tree.

One of Harry's first presents was a fairly sizable stack of books, courtesy of his mother. Checking the spines, Harry discovered they

were all of the books he'd need for the next six years of Hogwarts, charmed and restored back into pristine condition for him. Their eyes met and she mimed opening a book, so he did, finding a piece of faded parchment inside the cover of the top book. Eyes widening, he looked back up at Lily, who mouthed 'later'. His mother had just given him the Marauder's Map. That was going to be an interesting conversation later.

From his father, who still seemed intent on turning him into a quidditch player or auror, Harry received brand new quidditch pads to replace the standard ones the school loaned out to students who didn't have their own. Harry raised an eyebrow at the odd look of them; they weren't anywhere near as big as Hermione's hockey-adapted keeper pads, but they weren't as slim as he was used to either. James correctly interpreted his expression, though, and had an explanation. "I had your mother help me buy some of the same foam that's inside your friend's keeper pads. Sirius and I trimmed them down a bit and then added the dragonhide over the foam. They're not as sturdy as your friend's pads, but they're better than what anyone else at Hogwarts has."

"Cool. Thanks, Dad. And you too, Mum." Given the complexity of both presents (and the hidden second present inside his mother's), Harry didn't expect to receive anything else from them and therefore wasn't disappointed when nothing else appeared with his name on it. He also had gifts upstairs with Su, Hermione, and Daphne's names on them, so he knew he'd be getting a few more things when they exchanged gifts over the next few days.

He'd forgotten about Sirius and Amy, though. "Alright, Harry m'boy. I thought about putting my name on the present I helped your father with, but he charmed the tag so I couldn't come near it. Then I thought about piggybacking on your mum's gift, but I couldn't find where she was hiding it and she hexed me for trying to find it. So... after a lot of debate, I came up with the perfect present for you." Pulling out his wand, Sirius gave it a grand wave and wrapping paper exploded from the end, twisting and wiggling with a life of its own as it surrounded Cassie and bound her, followed by a bright red and gold ribbon to complete the look. "Happy Christmas!"

Cassie wriggled inside the wrapping paper, failing to free herself but succeeding in tipping herself over onto Harry's lap. "Daaaaad!"

Wincing under the dual glares from his wife and daughter, Sirius sighed and vanished the ribbon and paper. "Oh come on, we all know she has a ridiculously strong crush on him. It was funny." Amy just kept glaring at him and Sirius winced. "I'm going to be sleeping on the couch tonight, aren't I?" She nodded. "Bugger." Turning his attention back to Harry, Sirius smiled sheepishly. "No, actually, your present isn't here. My old bat of a mother croaked a few years back and so I can finally get into the family home. We had a pretty extensive library and since you seem intent on turning into your Uncle Remus... I might as well let you grab some good books. Better stuff in the library at Grimmauld Place than you'll find in any of your schoolbooks, I assure you."

"Sirius Black! You are not going to let my son go taking books from your nightmare of a family! Dark wizards, the lot of them! Who knows what he could end up bringing home?"

"Oh come on, Lily! I came out of that house and I turned out all right. Besides, I'll make sure it's nothing too bad. We actually use some of the same spell books in auror training these days. There's no harm in letting Harry learn to recognize dark magic and how to counter it."

"You are most certainly not 'all right' if you think I'm letting my son near that filth. You're a father. You should know better! Would you want Cassie near those kinds of books?"

Harry followed the conversation back and forth like a spectator at a tennis match, only stopping when a hand tapped him on the shoulder. Looking back, he found Remus grinning at him and holding out a hastily wrapped present. "It's not quidditch pads, six years worth of school books, or a trip to Grimmauld Place, but I hope you like it."

Unwrapping it, Harry found a small box and inside was... a pocket watch? Perfect. Now he could return the old one he'd taken from his father before the trip to Hogwarts back in September. There was something odd about the inside of the lid, though: a series of tiny

crystals and runes formed an array that even he was unfamiliar with. "What's this?"

"That... is something I discovered in my last days at Hogwarts. Each professor carries a small piece of jewelry with them, usually a ring or necklace, that connects them to the castle and lets them give or take points. I found a way to send out tiny pulses of magic that would resonate with the jewelry... like a bat's echolocation." Remus took the pocket watch from Harry, closing the lid and letting it rest face up on his palm. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Magic pulsed and flickered, indistinct and ghostly images that were vaguely humanoid cycling in midair about a foot above Remus's hand before disappearing. "Well, it's not very impressive here in Godric's Hollow. When you get back to school, though, it'll show you if any professors are nearby, how far away they are, and in what direction." The ghostly figures flickered by again and Remus looked down at the watch. "Mischief managed."

Harry took the pocket watch eagerly and tucked it into his pocket. "Thanks, Uncle Remus! This is going to make it a lot easier to track down teachers after class if I have questions about assignments." Remus gave him an uncertain smile as Sirius and James groaned, which was exactly what Harry wanted. He now had a method of tracking the professors on top of the full Marauder's Map. If he could only find his father's cloak, he'd be in business when he got back to school...

Harry was curled up in a chair in the sitting room with one of the books his mother had cleaned up for him, reading her thoughts on how mental clarity and willpower affected the summoning of objects, when a crack alerted him to the return of his mother. Peering over the top of his glasses, he grinned at the vaguely green tinge to Hermione's skin. "Enjoy the trip?"

"I'm going to vomit on your shoes, Harry James Potter." Hermione wrapped both arms around her midsection, flopping limply into a chair beside him and whining pitifully. "That was the most horrible thing I've ever experienced. And adult wizards do that all the time? I think I'll be

working somewhere with a fireplace I can use, thank you very much. If I had to do that at least twice a day, I might as well stop eating."

Chuckling, Harry closed his book and set it on the floor beside his chair before leaning over to pat Hermione on the shoulder. "I've heard it's better when you're apparating yourself instead of getting dragged side-along. You'll have to ask my father, though, because I doubt my mum had many people popping her around before she was old enough to do it herself. Muggleborn and all that."

Hermione nodded, leaning her head back and staring at the ceiling as she took deep breaths in and out. "God I hope so. Because that was just... urgh. Please tell me that's not how we're planning to get to King's Cross on the fifth?"

Actually, Harry wasn't entirely sure on that front. He wasn't sure his parents knew, either, given that James was working and Lily could only side-along one of them at a time. Two trips? Or was she counting on Harry and Rensaren to give them a lift to the station again? "Not sure. Portkey, maybe. Or floo. Apparition would be complicated, so it's down there with driving as far as likeliness."

"Oh, thank the Lord." Hermione chuckled and turned her head to look over at Harry. "So, get anything good for Christmas?"

Harry shrugged and leaned over, retrieving his book and holding it up for her to see. "Some books from Mum... some books from Sirius... pocket watch from Remus... some quidditch pads that match yours from Dad... marriage contracts from Daphne, Blaise Zabini, and a girl named Luna Lovegood..."

Nodding along absently, Hermione's eyes went wide at the last bit and Harry knew he had her full attention. "Wait, what? You lot still use marriage contracts? I mean, I know Daphne mentioned it a few times but I've never really brought it up with her and so I thought it was a joke or something. One of those pureblood things where I just nod, smile, and pretend I get why you lot are laughing at something stupid-sounding."

"Not all of us do. My grandparents tried to marry my dad off, but he was in love with my mom and so that didn't go anywhere. Mostly it's the really old-fashioned pureblood families that do it... the Malfoys, Parkinsons, Blacks, Crabbes, Goyles, and so on." Harry made a fist and then held out one finger of his other hand a few inches away. "The Greengrasses fall pretty much on the edge... they respect tradition but exist outside of the tight-knit clump of other traditional families. Works out pretty well for them when the outside families are experiencing an upswing, like they are at the moment, and keeps them from getting as inbred as the Crabbes and Goyles."

Hermione nodded again to show her understanding before biting her lip, contemplating something. "And the Zabini and Lovegoods? I know Blaise is that dark-skinned Ravenclaw girl... she was the last one to be sorted in our year. You were watching her pretty closely. Never heard of the Lovegoods, although Luna Lovegood sounds like she should be a Bond girl."

While he was familiar with the series from his time at the Dursleys and a trip or two to the cinema with Hermione and Ron before things went south, Harry knew he wasn't supposed to know about James Bond and his lovely ladies and so he kept his mouth shut on that particular facet of things. "According to my mother, Luna's father is Oddment Lovegood, publisher of The Quibbler. Her mother does some wild experimental stuff with charms and defensive magic. Neither really strikes me as the traditional type from what little I've heard, so I'm drawing a blank there."

"So you're not going to accept any of the contracts, right?" Hermione waited a beat and when Harry didn't respond fast enough for her tastes, sat up and glared at him. "Arranging marriages is a barbaric and antiquated concept and you shouldn't even be thinking about it, Harry Potter!"

Harry chuckled and waggled his eyebrows. "Have you seen Mrs. Greengrass? Daphne already looks a lot like her... if she grows up to look like THAT, investing in her now might not be such a bad idea."

Thankfully Hermione's righteous anger over the notion of women as saleable property kept her from realizing that Harry should be a bit on

the young side to appreciate women in a blatantly sexual way and she leaned over, slapping him hard upside the head. Then she paused, thought for a moment longer, and slapped him again. "No. Bad Harry. We don't objectify our women. We respect our women."

She then delivered a third slap, just for good measure.

Harry was rescued from further abuse by a redheaded rocket that attacked Hermione, hugging her tight before backing away and blushing. "Hermione! You're here!" Jasmine bounced on her toes, tossing a quaffle from one hand to the other as her eyes bounced back and forth between Hermione and the back door. "C'mon! I can show you our pitch!"

"Erm..." Hermione looked over at Harry, who gave her a little shrug. Not that he wasn't glad to have her there, but he was used to Hermione spending most of her time with Su. He wasn't adverse to her spending a bit of time with his little sister if she wanted to. "Well, if Harry doesn't care, I suppose it sounds like fun. My broom is shrunken in one of my bags along with my pads... although I reckon I don't need those, since we won't be using bludgers."

Watching the pair disappear off in search of one of his parents to activate the complex web of spells on the backyard that would turn it from frozen mess to quidditch pitch, Harry waited a moment before ducking into the hall and then heading up the stairs. While it wasn't on the same level as his former link with Voldemort, Harry could almost always feel roughly where his mother was and use that sixth sense to track her down. It took another flight of stairs and a visit to the musty attic to find her this time, knee deep in boxes of old school things. "Mum? I think I'm going to head over to the Lovegoods' home for a bit."

Lily looked up, a concerned expression on her face. "Is everything okay? I just got back with your friend. Why aren't you spending time with her?"

"Jasmine stole her."

"Ah." Moving to the end of the attic, Lily peered out the window. Harry joined her, watching as his father led Jasmine and Hermione out onto the pitch. He tapped away at something near the base of the three rings, causing an orange dome of energy to ripple outward, removing the snow. Hermione looked around in wonder before shedding her coat, and she and Jasmine chattered excitedly before mounting their respective brooms and taking to the air. "It's not a problem, is it? Jasmine's just excited to have someone to play with who's a decent keeper. She really wants to make the house team when she gets to Hogwarts."

As he watched Jasmine throw the quaffle at Hermione, looping around behind the rings as the brunette caught it and lingering to stare at his friend, the mystery behind his sister's sudden quidditch infatuation began to untangle inside Harry's mind. "She's chasing, but I don't think it has anything to do with quidditch. Just out of curiosity, Mum, when did Jasmine start on her little quidditch princess kick? Say... around the time she first met the lovely Miss Granger?"

Lily nodded, watching things outside with a critical eye for a moment before understanding dawned. "No..."

"She's Cassie's age, so it's not that out there, is it? And Cassie has been crushing on me for a while now. I know one when I see one and Jasmine definitely reminds me of Cassie with red hair and a broomstick right now. Not to mention I've got someone who'll be in her class next year sending me a marriage contract already." Patting his mother on the back, Harry grinned. "But my little sister's crushes aren't any of my business. Can I go take my present over to Luna?" Lily nodded absently and Harry waited a moment to see if she'd speak before turning and walking away. Down the rickety stairs from the attic, into his room to grab a present, then down another flight of stairs to the ground floor. Taking a pinch of floo powder, he tossed it into the fire and watched it burn green for a moment before stepping in. "The Rookery!"

Floo travel was a sensation that, no matter how old or powerful he became, Harry still detested. And still after all this time, he was pants at sticking the landing. Reaching his destination, Harry dropped to his knees as he came skidding out of the fire, unable to emerge in an

entirely controlled manner but not wanting to come out like a rogue bludger. Light tinkling laughter greeted his arrival, and Harry looked up to lay eyes on Luna Lovegood for the first time in this universe. "Hullo, Harry Potter."

Joe's Note: Hey guys, I had over two hundred and fifty of you visit from the UK to read my last chapter. Any of you guys want to try your hand at beta work? I'd really love a real Brit-picker, seeing as how they're hard to come by over here unless you want someone who goes to the same American to British 'dictionaries' that I can Google too.

"Hullo, Harry Potter."

Harry looked Luna up and down slowly before releasing a barely audible sigh and waving at her. Luna looked remarkably similar to how he was used to her appearing, with her wand tucked behind her ear (how she had one already at her age, though, was a mystery to him) and everything. Whether or not that was a good thing was up for debate. Out of all his friends, she was one he wouldn't have minded meeting a different version of. Perhaps, say, a saner one. But alas, it wasn't to be. There was nothing he could do about it, though, and so he struggled to his feet and brushed himself off. "Luna Lovegood, I presume?"

Shaking her head, the blonde pointed over at the doorway. "No, I'm her twin sister, Soleil. Luna's still upstairs prettying herself up for you. She's quite excited to be meeting you in person for the first time." Harry looked over at where Soleil was pointing and waited... and waited... and waited. When he heard another round of soft giggles, he knew he'd been had. "Oh, that was really quite amusing. No, I'm Luna. What's the matter, Harry? Am I not to your liking, that you're so eager to dismiss me?"

Oh, that was dangerous territory and Harry knew it. It was like when Ginny asked him if a certain pair of robes made her look fat, or if the muggle jeans she'd bought on a trip out with Hermione made her arse look big. He was well trained by now: any appearance-related question from a woman was to be answered with as many lies as necessary to preserve one's manhood.

The problem was, Luna was spectacularly good at telling when he was lying... or at least the one he was familiar with was. That and she looked just as bizarre as he was used to. Actually, she was a bit

better than in his home universe, he realized after a second, more thorough inspection. Her entire outfit was shades of blue, from a dark blue cardigan to a paler blue shirt beneath and matching ankle-length skirt. The butterbeer cork necklace and radish earrings were gone too, amazingly enough. While he hadn't liked that she'd taken them off for Slughorn's party since they were a part of who she was, they weren't a part of this Luna evidently and he had no problem admitting she was better for it.

Luna coughed and Harry blushed as he realized that he'd probably been standing there doing a fair impression of Crabbe for at least a minute. "Erm, there's nothing wrong with you, Luna. But my younger sisters are twins, you know. I know how grumpy girls can get when you pay attention to the wrong twin. I didn't want to get off on the wrong foot with someone who sent me a marriage contract. Seems like I managed that anyways, though."

"You have a left foot and a right foot, Harry. You have no wrong foot to get off on... and I'm not entirely sure what you'd be getting off of, even if you did." Luna considered that for a moment longer before shrugging and rising from the chair she'd dragged in front of the fireplace. "At any rate, we have things to discuss."

Blinking, Harry looked around in search of Oddment Lovegood's distinctive shock of pale blonde hair, rather reminiscent of the pictures of Albert Einstein he'd seen in primary school. "We do? Not that I think you're property or don't matter in this situation, Luna, but isn't the negotiation generally between either the two fathers or the bride-to-be's father and the prospective husband?"

Luna just waved her hand dismissively before grabbing his, leading him from the kitchen to the sitting room, where a plate of biscuits and some milk was waiting for them on a table in front of a couch that appeared to have been tie-dyed at some point. "It'd be a bit awkward for you to meet with my father, considering he doesn't know what he signed for me was a marriage contract."

"Wait a minute... what?"

Sighing, Luna rolled her eyes as she forced Harry to sit down on the couch, taking a seat next to him. "Well I didn't think he'd agree to it if I told him what I was going to do. So I waited until he was busy working on The Quibbler, then brought it in and told him it was something Mummy needed signed for Gringotts. It looked so official that he didn't even blink before signing where I pointed. And voila. One wedding contract, ready to send."

Harry tried to wrap his brain around that one. A ten year-old girl was conspiring to marry him and tricking her father into going along with it. It boggled the mind. Even for someone used to dealing with Luna. Wanting to buy himself some more time, he held out the present he'd bought for her. "I got you something for Christmas."

"Oh! Thank you! I didn't get you anything... although I am trying to give you myself, so I suppose that counts for something." Luna took the wrapped book from him and carefully removed the ribbon followed by the wrapping paper, laying each on the table and smoothing them out before examining her new possession. "Comma Sutra: Position Yourself for Success With Good Grammar." Luna opened the book and flipped through the first two or three pages until she landed on the table of contents. "Assume the Position: Nouns, Pronouns, and Verbs. Bondage 101: Conjunctions. Four Play: Four Common Grammar Headaches. Sex and the Single Sentence." Grinning, Luna looked up over the top of the book at him. "How delightfully witty, Harry. Thank you!"

Harry waved off the thank you, blushing a bit. "Honestly, I'm a little surprised you get the references. You're a bit young for that, aren't you?"

Shaking her head, Luna twisted to kneel on the couch and held one arm out over the back. "Melvil. Kama Sutra, please." Harry turned and watched as the bookshelf shuddered, an arm emerging from the side and grabbing one book off the middle shelf, tossing it through the air to Luna. "Thank you, Melvil." Plunking herself down again, Luna held it out to Harry. "It's quite an interesting read. There are five chapters on the acquisition of a wife, and even a chapter on how the chief wife should behave compared to the lesser wives in a polygamous marriage."

Eyeing the book like a particularly poisonous snake (or worse, given he could talk a snake out of biting him), Harry cleared his throat uncomfortably. "Doesn't that have all of the positions for... you know... in it too?" The idea of a ten year-old reading a book like that often enough to recite facts about its contents was bloody frightening and more than a little disturbing from a social perspective. He knew his mother would have a kneazle if she found him with something like that, much less Jasmine or Rose.

Luna nodded, flipping the book open and running her finger down the page before coming to a certain passage. "It does. According to Daddy, I was from the night they experimented with the 'kulisha' position. Mummy smacked him in the head for telling me that and told him he was corrupting my innocent mind."

"Err, right." Well, someone had certainly warped her mind. Harry had always assumed it was the death of her mother that drove Luna to be slightly batty, but she was still a bit left of center here with both parents alive. Maybe it was just the proximity to her bizarre father? Something in her breeding? Aunt Marge's comment long ago about the bitch and the pup came back to him... he'd never met Selene Lovegood. Perhaps after he did, things would become clearer. "So, getting back to the reason I'm here..."

Reaching back over her shoulder, Luna nodded. "Melvil. Interview kit, please." There was a whoosh of air behind them and then Luna brought her hand forward with a wooden box in it, setting it out beside the biscuits and withdrawing a piece of parchment and a Quick-Quotes Quill. Harry gave it an odd look and Luna raised an eyebrow at him. "You didn't think I actually wanted to marry you, did you? I'm only ten, Harry."

Harry groaned, rubbing his temples. He was being repeatedly outwitted by a preteen version of Luna Lovegood. He was deeply, deeply ashamed of himself. "Alright. So if you're not serious about the marriage contract, why send it all? You're not the only person who sent me one, you know, so yes I was thinking you were serious."

"Oh. No, I'm not Sirius. He's your father's partner." Wow. Now Harry knew how Professor McGonagall had felt when he'd dropped that one on her. That was a really stupid joke. Luna fiddled with the royal blue Quick-Quotes Quill for a moment before leaning back. "So, there were other girls sent you marriage contracts? Who?"

After eyeing the quill for a moment, Harry figured there was no harm in answering. After all, copies of all contracts sent were archived at the Ministry of Magic and she could find the answer there if he was unwilling to part with it. "Blaise Zabini and Daphne Greengrass." The quill scribbled something onto the parchment and his gaze bounced from it to Luna and back. "I'm very, very confused."

Luna took one of the biscuits, nibbling on it while eyeing him like a particularly bizarre animal she'd write about for The Quibbler. "Hmm. Mummy was right. Men really do need to have everything explained to them if you want them to keep up." Ouch. Misandrist preteen Luna. This was certainly boding well for a pleasant future friendship. "Do you happen to know what my Daddy does for a living, Harry Potter?"

"He publishes The Quibbler."

"Good, so you do know a little something. Well, I want to work for him as a reporter when I grow up. He doesn't take me seriously yet." Perhaps that was because she was TEN, but Harry was wise enough to keep that to himself. "So I decided I'd get an interview with the boy who electrocuted three mountain trolls and saved the Samhuinn festivities at Hogwarts." Luna reached into her wooden box and held up a set of papers. "But if I wanted to do a formal interview request, I'd have to owl these to your parents because you're a minor still. Even though I'm a minor too. And I've heard from my sources at Hogwarts that you're really quite mature, so I thought that if I tried to contract with you, you'd handle it directly instead of sending your father and I could have an informal interview. Like when a reporter runs into a person coming out of court. And now here you are."

It was convoluted, far too advanced for a ten year-old... and utterly brilliant. Harry shook his head. He'd fallen for it, too, which made it even worse. He revised his estimation of this Luna upward another notch or two; she would most definitely bear watching and active

courting, as a friend if nothing more. She was like Hermione on acid, a fearsome combination of intellect and non-linear thinking that had the potential to shatter boundaries and tear away the rules of magic that the wizarding world clung to if properly guided.

It was then and there that Harry decided that guiding her would be a major new priority in his life, if for no other reason than to keep Voldemort and his followers away from the brilliant and bizarre witch. Which meant being a good sport about the trap he'd blundered into and doing this interview of hers. Harry leaned back against a pillow that wriggled and patted his shoulders as it moved into a position most comfortable for him. "So let me get this straight, just to make sure we're on the same page here. You don't want to marry me, you just want to interview me?"

Groaning, Luna rested her head in her hands. "Now I know why Mummy says she's the brains of this operation. Men really are thick."

"Hey!"

"Moving on to the next question... is it true that you carry and use Rensaren, the legendary wand of Þrúðr Thordotter?" Harry's eyes widened and Luna shrugged innocently. "I have eyes and ears everywhere, Harry. Now answer the question. Is that or is that not Rensaren tucked up your sleeve?"

Harry held his hands up in surrender. "I plead the Fifth?" Oh wait. He was a pureblood-raised half-blood. He wasn't supposed to know anything about America outside of that it was where 'Yanks' were and that Salem had a school there that accepted all kinds of 'riff-raff', also known as mixed-heritage students.

Thankfully Luna seemed more focused on tearing his argument apart than figuring out how he could make said argument, crossing her arms over her chest and narrowing her eyes at him. "You're not American, Harry. You're not protected by the Constitution."

"You're not American either!" Harry threw his hands up in the air, flopping back against the couch. "How do you even KNOW that reference?"

"I'm a woman. I know everything."

For the rest of the afternoon, Harry lounged in the sitting room with Luna and let her bombard him with questions about his family life, school life, quidditch performance, and the troll incident. Given the Longbottoms already knew about his wand and likely couldn't keep a secret to save their lives even if they wanted to, Harry had no qualms about sharing what little he knew about Rensaren. It did make a rather interesting story, after all, and Luna had put a lot of work into being able to get close enough to him to get a story. He might as well reward her initiative.

At one point, a mid-thirties doppelgänger of Luna complete with wand tucked behind her ear wandered into the room with a tea service, kissed the top of Luna's head, and wandered back out. So that was Selene Lovegood. Harry snorted. Oh yes, Luna was definitely her parents' child. Then again, so was he, so did he really have room to laugh?

As the sun dwindled and dipped below the horizon, though, Harry realized poor Hermione was probably being run well and truly ragged by Jasmine and so he decided to take pity on his friend and return to the house. After watching Luna pitch the marriage contract into the roaring fire and promising to owl her, Harry took a pinch of floo powder and flicked it into the flames. "Potter Place!"

After another twisting, gut-wrenching trip through the floo, Harry came flying out and rolled across the kitchen floor before coming to rest on his back, staring up at the ceiling. Three different laughs greeted his arrival and Harry turned his head, finding not only Hermione and Jasmine but Su as well. "Wotcher."

That just set off Hermione and Jasmine again, leaving Su to roll her eyes before standing up, walking over to give Harry a hand up off the floor. "Sheng dan kuai le."

"Gesundheit."

Su rolled her eyes again, waiting till he was on his feet before pulling away. "I don't see why I even bother around you ignorant gweilos. Fine. Happy Christmas." Walking back over, she seated herself next to Hermione and crossed her legs, drawing a glare from Jasmine as Hermione leaned over to pat her friend's hand. "So, have a pleasant afternoon with your bride-to-be? Daphne's going to be furious, you know. Didn't she claim you first?"

Sighing, Harry wandered over to the refrigerator and withdrew a plate with some slices of turkey on it, bringing it over to the counter so he could make a sandwich. "Funny, Su. No, Luna actually sent me the contract as... well, a trap, I suppose is the best way to describe it. She just wanted to get me over to her house so she could interview me for The Quibbler, but didn't want to try and get formal interview request papers past my parents."

"But if you just so happened to drop by her house for some reason and answered a few questions she asked you... she wouldn't need to get your parents' approval." Su nodded slowly, her grin growing wider. "Bloody brilliant that is. Well at least you know she won't be headed for Gryffindor and you'll be safe at school next year."

Slapping a few slices of turkey between two pieces of bread, Harry returned the plate to the fridge and hopped up to sit on the counter. "Oh yes, because a fearsome intellect is definitely a sign you're guaranteed to end up in Ravenclaw. Just out of curiosity, Su, what color is your tie at school? And Hermione's?" The diminutive Asian blushed at that and Harry chalked up a point for himself. "Besides, after today? I'd guess Slytherin over Ravenclaw. Slytherin, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, Gryffindor in order of likelihood."

Harry raised his sandwich to his mouth, only to have it yanked away by an invisible magical hand as his mother breezed into the kitchen. "Oh no you don't. You're going to ruin your dinner." Putting the sandwich on a plate and throwing a stasis charm over it, she tucked it away on an unused portion of the counter and then pointed at the fridge. "Now make our dinner."

Lips quirking upward, Harry slid off the counter and walked over to reopen the fridge, contemplating the contents. "Are we going

shopping, serving leftovers, or should we floo out for take-away tonight? Because there's nothing in here that we can use to build a meal from scratch."

"What? You can't be serious." Harry opened his mouth and Lily held up one hand. "I swear young man, if you make a comment related to your godfather, I will have you scrubbing out the loo with one of the spare toothbrushes your friend brought." Harry's mouth snapped shut and he pantomimed zipping his lips shut. "Now, there's seriously nothing decent to eat? I could have sworn I went shopping this week..."

Harry held the door open so his mother could peer inside. "Did you take Hermione into account when you went shopping? Girl eats more than Dad. If I hadn't seen the scar where the bone popped out, I'd swear her leg was hollow." Hermione returned a sweet smile followed by a rude gesture, which Harry sent right back at her. Except while Hermione escaped unscathed, he found himself slapped upside the head. "Oww! Mum!"

Shrugging unapologetically, Lily brushed past and went over to the fireplace, reaching into a vase and pulling out a bundle of fliers for local restaurants. "I don't care if she started it, she's a girl and you're going to be a bit more respectful than your father was at your age if it kills me. And Hermione's only been here for a late lunch so far, so you can't blame the lack of food on her. Yet."

"So wait a minute, because she's a girl and I'm not, she can flip me off but I can't do the same?" Harry huffed, crossing his arms over his chest. "That's so unfair."

"Life sucks and then a bludger hits you in the crotch." Hermione shrugged and grinned impishly. "By the way, Harry, have I told you lately that you have the coolest mother ever?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "Uh huh. You just like her because she lets you get away with murder. Kinda like how Snape treats his Slytherins." He watched his mum flinch at the comparison to the greasy-haired bastard and chalked up another point for himself. Not that he minded getting in trouble for doing something wrong, but maybe she'd be a

little less eager to enforce double standards and wave the whole 'girl power' banner in the future. Merlin knew Hermione started enough shit, and if he was the one getting punished every time... he'd go nuts in very short order. "Anyways... dinner? If you're not going to let me eat my sandwich, can we get moving on that? I'm hungry, Mum."

It was actually Su who came to his stomach's rescue, getting up and fishing a red and gold flier out of the pile that she then offered up to his mother. "My aunt and uncle run a Chinese restaurant. We could floo them to order dinner and I bet they'd offer you a discount because I'm here. Well, assuming I have permission to stay for dinner? Hermione wasn't clear on that when she invited me to floo over."

"Of course you can stay although Hermione, in the future it would be nice if you asked before inviting strangers into my house." The muggleborn at least had the grace to blush at the rebuke and Lily nodded before examining the flier. "I've heard good things about the Changs' cooking, though. I've never had a chance to try it because James doesn't like Chinese, but he's working tonight. Working on Boxing Day. That just seems unnatural. Alright, everyone figure out what you want and I'll floo over there with the order."

After a bit of consideration and some advice from Su, Harry selected Mao's braised pork and left Su and Hermione to try and explain the cuisine to his younger sisters as he and his mother took their leave. As soon as they entered the sitting room, Harry flicked his wand and summoned the book hiding the Marauder's Map to him, causing Lily to sigh. "You want an explanation, I assume?"

Harry took a seat on the couch, his mother joining him. "It'd be nice to know why you gave me a sheet of dirty old parchment for Christmas, yes. The books I understand passing down, but it's not like money's so tight that we're recycling parchment here."

"I don't know what the range is on this thing, but... I solemnly swear that I am up to no good." The Marauder's Map surged to life, drawing out a map of the castle and the few professors and students who had opted to remain there for the holidays. "I'll be damned. It works from here." Lily shook her head before tapping the map again. "Mischief

managed. No, this is actually something of your father's... that I don't want him to have anymore. So I figured if I gave it to you myself, you might actually use it for something halfway responsible. Better that than your father trying to pressure you into start a second generation of Marauders, at least in my opinion."

Even though he knew exactly what she was talking about, Harry forced himself to look curious. "Why?"

Lily sighed. "I've told you this before... your father wasn't a particularly pleasant person when he was younger. He was a bully, a braggart, and a prankster, and I hated it. I abhorred 'Prongs' of the 'Marauders' and I was very happy when he finally grew up into James Potter and started to leave that sort of thing behind. Now that you're getting older, your father seems to be regressing again... and I really don't want to see that happen. So if you have the Map, he'll have to write it off as lost or destroyed and can't give it to you with some speech about the wonderfulness of pranks and how you should try to break his detention record. Understand?"

"Got it. Don't suppose you know where Dad's old invisibility cloak is, do you?" Harry gulped when Lily slowly turned and fixed him with a very intense look. "Oh. You never knew he owned one, did you?" She shook her head. "Oh. Bugger. I'm... going to go see how that dinner order is coming." Harry ran towards the kitchen, his mother right behind him.

She wasn't after him, he discovered, when she surged past and grabbed some floo powder, tossing it into the fireplace. "JAMES POTTER'S OFFICE!" Throwing herself into the green flames, Lily disappeared into the network, whirling towards London and the Ministry of Magic.

Jasmine let out a low whistle. "I think Dad's in trouble."

Rose nodded. "We should probably get out the sheets and pillow for the couch." Then something occurred to her. "Wait. Where are we going to put Hermione then?"

Fortunately, Jasmine already had a solution to that problem. "My room!"

Oh, this was going to end well...

As the evening bled into night, the family enjoyed dinner before splitting up the way they always did to pursue individual amusements. Thankfully his mother was able to distract Jasmine, meaning Harry could spend some time with Hermione and Su before Su had to leave for the evening. And, seeing as how both were there and it was a peculiar sort of joint gift, Harry decided to give them their Christmas presents.

"You got me a book for Christmas?" Hermione eyed the wrapped package, running her fingers over it. "Lord, you really are a bookworm aren't you?"

Harry snorted as he passed Su her present. "Isn't that the cauldron calling the kettle black, Hermione? Besides, I think you two are going to like these. So go on. Open your presents."

The pair looked at their books, holding them up together to compare size. "You got us the same book?" Su frowned and shook her head slowly. "See, if you're going to pull something like that, you should at least be smart enough not to give them to the girls together. We like to be able to think we're special, even when we're not."

"Well, if you two would shut up, stop picking on me, and open your presents, you'd see that they are special." Harry crossed his arms over his chest and waited while they unwrapped them to reveal what he knew would look like two copies of the same book, a guide to intermediate-level transfiguration. "Now flip them over." On the reverse, rather than the back cover, was what appeared to be a second cover advertising an intermediate charms text. "Okay, now both of you open the book."

Hermione opened her copy a moment before Su, flipping through a few pages before looking up at Harry. "Okay? It's a textbook. I'd say thanks if I wasn't miffed about the whole 'same gift as Su' bit. We

didn't even rate some individual thought? I thought you were my friend."

Frowning at her book for a moment, Su raised her gaze to Harry and narrowed her eyes. "At least you rated a book that's a book. Harry, are you aware that mine is blank inside?"

"Yep. Flip it over and open the transfiguration side." Su kept eyeing him but did as she was told, eyes widening. Harry knew what she would find: the transfiguration text that the cover said it would be... inside what she'd thought to be an empty book. "Voila. Between the two of you, you now have a charms text and a transfiguration text with some more advanced spells, not to mention tips and tricks from my dad in the transfiguration section, my mom in the charms section, and a few homemade spells my mom threw in for you to try. But the thing is... you'll have to either make a schedule about when you can use each half or study together. Each book can show either the transfiguration or the charms, but only one book can be showing each at any one time. Was a right pain, too; I had to get both mom and dad to recommend a book, buy two of each, get them to write the same thing in each book, and then research and cast the charm that links them myself." The two were staring at him oddly and Harry shrugged defensively. "What? I thought you'd like the books and it'd be a way of bringing you closer together as friends."

"We spend most of our waking hours together, Harry. The only time Su gets to escape me is when I'm on a broom." Hermione snickered and rose from the couch so she could hug Harry. "Seriously, though, thank you. It's a much better gift now that we know what it is. Remind me to dig your present out of my bag later."

A second pair of arms wrapped around Harry as Su added herself to the group hug. "Thank you, Harry, for the very lovely gift that ensures Hermione and I are out of your way so you can spend all your time with your lovely brides-to-be and not feel guilty."

Harry sighed. Why was everyone picking on him today?

The being publicly known as Winifred Burkle stood uncertainly on the street in front of her house, wand in hand. The homunculi that served to represent her shell's parents were stored safely on the second floor of her abode, with an illusion in place that showed the happy family of three celebrating the odd religious holiday known as 'Hanukkah' and a muggle-repelling charm in place to keep the neighbors away. All that was left to do was see if the wizarding world's oddest form of transport was still active on a day like today.

Thrusting her wand hand out, 'Winifred' waited for a long moment before being rewarded with a bang. A moment later, a bright purple, triple-decker bus appeared in front of her. The door groaned open and discharged a young man in a uniform as purple as his conveyance. "Welcome to the Knight Bus, emergency transport for the stranded witch or wizard. Just stick out your wand hand, step on board, and we can take you anywhere you want to go." It was then that he noticed who he was talking to, frowning as he rubbed his chin. "Ain't you a bit young to be out here without your parents?"

Reaching up, she wrapped her thin fingers around the man's neck and threw him away from the bus, watching him land in the snow halfway down the block and twitch once before going still. Turning her icy blue gaze on the driver, 'Winifred' raised an eyebrow. "Will you convey me to my destination?" The driver nodded fearfully and she stepped aboard, grabbing a pole mounted at the top of the stairwell and turning to stare out the windshield. "Diagon Alley. Now."

With another bang, the bus was off again. Without it's conductor, she noted with amusement. Evidently, she had made quite the impression on the driver. The bus raced down the streets, moving slowly from the countryside to the city, weaving through the increasingly busy sections of London as it drew closer to its destination. Finally, the Knight Bus arrived in front of the Leaky Cauldron and slammed to a stop. "Diagon Alley, miss. That will be..." The driver trailed off when she shot him a look that promised painful death should he continue. "Never mind."

She turned away and stomped up the stairs to the pub that served as a gateway between the muggle and magical worlds, passing through

the dimly lit interior on her way to the back alley where the portal to Diagon Alley was. Tapping her wand against certain bricks, she waited while the wall parted to grant her access and then stepped into the alley proper.

At this hour, there was only one store still lit from inside and she headed straight for it, rapping her knuckles sharply against the door. After a moment, a figure emerged from the back room and peered at her with bright green eyes, taking in her appearance before smirking and coming forward to open the door. "Father! What a pleasure to see you! Say, have you switched to some kind of new facial cream? You're looking so YOUNG these days..."

"You are, as these muck say, as funny as a broken wand, daughter." Illyria breezed past into the store her daughter maintained in Diagon Alley and turned in a slow circle, observing the motley array of pets that had been imported for sale to adventurous wizards. "Out of curiosity, may I use your true name or do you have one of the muck you have been defiling yourself with on the premises somewhere?"

Snorting, her daughter hopped up to sit on the counter next to the cash register. "You never call me 'Dawn Summers', even when I have a store full of customers. I doubt me having a boyfriend here would stop you from calling me Oriens either."

Illyria nodded as she walked over, moving behind the counter and rummaging around. "Where is the present you promised me, daughter?"

"You know, bringing me a gift... a 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy Hanukkah'... all more appropriate ways to get what you want." Illyria shot her a glare and Oriens rolled her neon green eyes before nudging her parent out of the way behind the counter, quickly locating a wrapped bundle the size of her fist and presenting it to Illyria. "Here. Merry Christmas, Father."

Quickly unwrapping the parcel, Illyria examined the gemstone inside and allowed a very rare smile to cross her features. "I thought my sarcophagus and its stones destroyed when I was unable to scry for it. Thank you, Oriens. This will be invaluable."

Joe's Note: Thanks to all of you who voiced their opinion in a reasonable manner. The two options, yes, one was a bit silly but it was deliberately odd as a parody of some of the utterly bizarre slash fic premises. As for the results... the final tally came out with the girl!Blaise winning by over a two to one ratio, even when I included "these both sound cool and here's my thoughts on each" as votes for both rather than one or the other. So now you know.

Oh, and another pet peeve because this cannibalizes another idea from the original fic... am I the only one whose family isn't a Siamese twin with another family? I mean, it's like Sirius and his family was constantly stuck to the arse of the Potters. They don't have a house or their own food?

Rolling up a letter for Hedwig, Harry whistled softly to attract the owl's attention. While he was relatively certain that Daphne wouldn't be too terribly happy with him for showing up at her party with another girl, given her possessive nature when it came to him, he still felt a bit bad for Luna just as he had in their original universe. She was clearly saner here and perhaps even capable of blending in if she so chose, but by acting as she wanted to rather than how society dictated a person should, children her own age undoubtedly gave her a wide berth. Hopefully introducing her to Hermione and Su would help make Hogwarts more hospitable for her next year.

Well, Su and Daphne once the blonde got over her annoyance with him were more likely to be sympathetic than Hermione. Hermione and Luna... they were like an unstoppable force meeting an immovable object. It would be funny to watch, though, and had the potential to blunt Daphne's unhappiness before it had a chance to take hold.

"So, which one of your blondes are you sending a letter to today? Or were your thoughts lying in a darker direction?" Harry turned to find Hermione leaning against his doorframe, a smirk on her lips. Despite his repeated assertion that Luna was interested in him only as an interview subject and he'd never even met Blaise (at least in this universe, which was all that counted), she still was unwilling to let it drop. He was getting better at not reacting, though, and after a long moment of silence she sighed in defeat and jerked her thumb toward

the stairwell. "Your mum said to come tell you that lunch was in twenty minutes."

Harry nodded and Hermione waited another long, uncomfortable minute before turning to leave. Screw it, he decided. It might mark him as unusually perceptive for a boy his age, but he was in the mood for giving as good as he got, and Hermione hadn't caught on to the discrepancy yet. "I was writing Luna, if you must know. I'm asking if she wants to come with me to the New Year's party that Daphne's holding. I figure it'll do her some good to get out of the house and meet someone other than her crazy parents. And Hermione?" The muggleborn looked over at him and he grinned widely. "Before you start cracking jokes about Daphne and I, just ask yourself this... how much of a jealous Jasmine are you going to be rooming with when you get back?"

Brow furrowing in a rather familiar expression, Harry waited as Hermione tried to puzzle that one out before stepping back into his room and closing the door behind herself. "What are you on about, Harry? Why would Jasmine be jealous of me going somewhere?"

"You honestly don't see it?" Hermione shook her head and Harry groaned; he could have sworn eleven year-old girls were capable of at least identifying crushes and such. Wait, in the old universe Lavender and Pārvatī's giggling about who liked who and who was cute had driven Hermione up the wall and immediately soured any chance of friendship there. So Hermione shouldn't have been this obtuse... and he shouldn't have been stuck having this oh-so-awkward conversation. "You can't possibly think of a reason why Jasmine might be jealous that you're leaving on New Year's Eve to spend time with me, Daphne, and Su? Particularly the girl you're attached enough to that you invited her over to visit while you were a guest in someone else's home?"

Hermione opened her mouth, closed it, thought hard for a moment... and then realization finally dawned. "No..."

Rolling his eyes, Harry nodded. "Yup."

"Magical people do that too? I mean, not to be rude or anything but... I've never read anything about a famous gay wizard or lesbian witch. Not that I've done a lot of research into the subject, mind you, but in all my reading about famous magical people of the last few centuries, I don't recall reading about even one. But your sister is?" Harry nodded; he was as certain as he could be without using legilimency or veritaserum on Jasmine. "And she likes me?"

Holding out his hand, Harry summoned his broom to him from where Jasmine had dumped it against the wall just inside the door. He'd have to have a word with his sister later about respecting loaned property better. "My sister used to have no real direction. She didn't like domestic things, she didn't like sports... she liked to gossip and put the minimum amount of energy into schoolwork." Harry pointed the handle of his Nimbus at Hermione. "And then you come to visit... and she's the house's newest little quidditch fanatic, and wants to be a Gryffindor chaser. Even makes you promise to come visit and practice with her. You show up, and she's on you like stink on a troll. What do you think?"

Hermione groaned and rubbed her palms against her temples. "Bloody hell. I'm not ready to deal with this. I mean, I'm eleven, Harry. And not really that interesting of an eleven year-old at that, as much as it pains me to admit it. I don't duel trolls or anything like you. I can see why girls crush on you; you're like a little knight..."

"Little?"

"What? It's true. You are rather short. As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, you're like a little knight in shining armor. You stand up for people, you do heroic things when adults run away screaming." Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and leaned back against the door, head dipping and allowing her hair to mask her face. "What's so great about me?"

Perhaps he would have been a bit more sympathetic if he didn't have at least two, possibly more, girls crushing on him at the moment. As it was, Harry just shrugged. "I don't know. But I do know something. For some reason, she's decided that you're the best thing since self-stirring cauldrons. And she's my little sister. So please, for the love of

Merlin, don't do something that'll make me have to choose between a friend and a family member, okay?"

Hermione looked up and studied him for a moment before nodding. "You know, you don't act like any other boy in our year. You're far too mature. Are you sure you're not like, an adult who drank a deaging potion or found the Fountain of Youth or somesuch? Maybe you're James Potter's long-lost brother and cousin who he's letting pretend to be his son?"

Wow, she'd finally noticed it. Harry smiled wryly as he thought back to his musings just a few short minutes ago. That would teach him. And oh, if she only knew. Perhaps he'd let her in soon, seeing as how Luna had turned out to be a normal (well, as normal as Luna could be) member of this dimension instead of a fellow traveler. He could use someone who knew his secret, who could help him cover with others. "I promise, Hermione, at no point in my life have I ever been old enough to graduate Hogwarts."

She gave him a long, considering look and it made Harry wonder if she was trying to pick apart what was technically a truth; he'd never finished his seventh year before coming to this world. Eventually, though, Hermione shook her head. "I'll figure you out some day, Harry Potter." Her stomach broke the serious moment by growling loudly and she blushed. "But not today. Come on. Your mum actually did something more than soup and sandwiches for lunch and I'm starving."

Real food for lunch? Harry wondered if they were having someone over. The only time the family saw more the sandwiches was... when he cooked it, come to think of it. Unless Lily was breaking out a new level of domestic dedication when he wasn't home, which he severely doubted.

Stepping past his friend, Harry opened the door and gestured for Hermione to go first. "Oh, and Hermione? You know Gwenog Jones? The Holyhead Harpies beater that Jasmine bought you a poster of for Christmas? There's also a Gabrielle Jones on the team... and, well, they're not sisters." Harry bit back a smile as Hermione's eyes

widened. If that surprised her, Dumbledore would blow her mind... so he decided he ought to keep his suspicions on that front to himself.

Although Harry sincerely doubted there was a heterosexual man in either the muggle or magical worlds with such an extensive collection of Elton John albums...

Two days later, the night before he was scheduled to visit the Greengrass Estate for New Year's Eve, the family's pudding was disrupted by a soft pop and then a knock against the backdoor of the house. Harry looked up away from his conversation with Hermione and frowned at the sight of the headmaster waiting outside. Well now. This was just plain irregular. What did Dumbledore want?

Lily got up and answered the door, gesturing for her former headmaster to enter the dining room. "Albus! What can I do for you? I haven't heard from you since Samhuinn, if I remember right."

"Ah, it would seem that unlike my own, your memory is working quite well these days. No, I've come to speak with you and your husband about your son." Dumbledore's eyes took in the assembled crowd in the dining room before his gaze landed on one particular Potter and he inclined his head slightly. "With young Harry included, of course."

Oh, this could not be a good thing. Harry looked around the table at his sisters and Hermione before nodding towards the door. "Jasmine, out or I won't let you use my Nimbus for the rest of my vacation. Rose, out or I won't let Jasmine use my Nimbus and she'll take it out on you because she'll know it's your fault. Hermione, can you hover dessert out into the sitting room?" Hermione nodded and drew her wand, leading the way as the twins slunk out behind her, shooting him glares in between curious looks at the famed Hogwarts headmaster. Soon, though, it was just Harry, his parents, and the headmaster. "Headmaster Dumbledore. Have a good Christmas?"

Dumbledore nodded, conjuring up a seat across the table from Harry. "Indeed I did. Alas, I still have yet to convince people that all I truly need these days are nice warm socks and so I received far too many expensive gifts, but it is the thought that counts, I suppose." His gaze flickered over to the door through which the others had recently

passed. "You're just as capable a leader at home as you are on the field, it appears."

"With all due respect, headmaster, I'm sure you're not here to become another member of Harry's Angels." At the confused look of his parents and Dumbledore, Harry grinned sheepishly. "Turns out that after the trolls, Hermione and my other friends conspired to organize a not-so-secret society to protect me from myself. They've decided to call themselves Harry's Angels. It's touching, in an odd sort of way."

Leaning back in his chair, Dumbledore shook his head. "As amusing as that sounds, you are quite right in assuming that's not why I'm here. No, I wanted to discuss the idea of you potentially testing out of your year and joining the second years at minimum, if not higher. I have discussed you with every one of your teachers and with the exception of Professor Snape, all of them recognize you are performing far beyond your peers at present. You must be terribly bored."

Harry winced as his parents fixed him with incredulous stares; while his mum knew about his abilities to a certain degree, this was news to James. And it meant he was going to have to try and sell the story he'd given Luna to his perceptive mother and even more perceptive headmaster directly, rather than letting read it in The Quibbler first and then tackling it a few months later. "The problem, headmaster, is that Rensaren's got a bit more to share with my brain than I let on after Halloween. I've got Þrúðr's entire life at my fingertips and considering people at the time thought she was a goddess... turning a matchstick into a needle or levitating a feather isn't terribly difficult for me, no. But my knowledge starts becoming less useful as we get further into school; Hogwarts wasn't even around back then and the OWLs and NEWTs certainly weren't. There are loads of spells I don't know that I need to for either real life or the exams, and I don't want to risk missing out on them even if nine out of every ten classes puts me to sleep."

"I... see. This is indeed disturbing news, Harry." Dumbledore leaned forward, peering over the top of his glasses at Harry. "Not only do you have access to magic far beyond what a person of your age and

maturity should, but Thor and Þrúðr were most certainly not 'gods' content to sit back and enjoy worship. Tell me, how many of those memories involve war and all its cruelties? No, this will simply not do. If needed, we can ask Ollivander to craft a wand for you from scratch no matter the cost and charge it to Hogwarts, but I can't in good conscience allow such an item cannot remain in the hands of someone this young. Harry, I must ask you to surrender the wand in question." Heh. No. Harry shook his head and Dumbledore turned to his parents for reinforcements. "James, Lily, surely you see that this would be for the best."

James nodded eagerly, but Lily looked far more hesitant. "I don't want to cripple my son's magic just because you think it's a good idea, Albus."

Much to Harry's surprise, it was his father rather than Dumbledore himself who came to the defense of the idea. "C'mon, Lily. This isn't Fudge or Umbridge trying to give us advice. It's Albus Dumbledore. I'm sure that if he says we can find another wand that's as good or even a better match for our son that it's true. And I can't say I'm too keen on some old bat with a goddess complex sticking herself into our son's head. You know, maybe this explains his sudden enjoyment of cooking and helping you out around the house..."

Lily glared at her husband for that one. "Yes, because God forbid a man in this backwards, male chauvinist society of yours lower himself to doing 'woman's work'. Besides, you weren't there when we went through all of Ollivander's looking for this wand. Why should Harry give up his wand and hope that Ollivander can come through in the future when NONE of the wands in the shop responded to him? What possible combination could there be that's not already there, unless we want to try a more exotic core than unicorn, phoenix, or dragon in a wand for Harry? Besides, he's gotten this far with it and he's not running around trying to... I don't know, rule the world or kill his classmates or something."

Wincing, Harry held up his hand. "I've zapped Neville pretty good with lightning. Although in my defense, he was threatening to attack Hermione and Daphne."

"Not helping, sweetie." Lily flicked her wand haphazardly at him and Harry narrowed his eyes as he felt his lips disappear, cutting off his ability to speak. "The family will take responsibility for anything that Harry does, and remove him from the school if it becomes necessary. Is that good enough for you, Albus?"

Dumbledore sighed and pulled a tin out of his robes, removing a lemon drop and popping it into his mouth. "I dare say that conversations like this make me miss the days when you were a far more tractable and innocent first year, Lily my dear. That would be an acceptable state of affairs while I research the matter further, as long as Harry visits a friend of mine at St. Mungo's this summer. Not for testing or anything along those lines, before you concern yourselves. My friend worked with many of the soldiers who came back from the war against Grindelwald with... difficulties. I simply wish to have him assess how Harry is handling the foreign memories, nothing more."

Flicking his wrist, Harry let the wand in question jump into his hand and wordlessly cancelled the charm on his mouth. While he wasn't too terribly worried, having both a copy of what would here be 'Neville's wand' as well as Mjolnir upstairs in a locked box under his bed, he liked the idea of keeping Rensaren as well and was glad his mother was coming to his defense. But... "You want me to see a shrink?"

"I do believe he prefers to be called a Mind-Healer just like his fellows, but you can ask him about that during your first session if you wish." Dumbledore's gaze turned to James and Lily. "I allowed Remus to attend Hogwarts in spite of his condition, as long as he followed certain guidelines. I am willing to accommodate the needs of my students, but only as long as they do not pose a threat to the student body as a whole. Harry will need to attend counseling, or he will not attend Hogwarts next fall."

Merlin. All this for slightly advanced skills and a few spells he'd taken from a Norse woman with a goddess complex. Suddenly, Harry was very glad indeed that they didn't know the full extent of his knowledge and powers, and that he hadn't come right out and confessed his true origins to either the headmaster or his parents. Forget counseling, he'd be locked in St. Mungo's in the bed Frank Longbottom had

occupied in his old world. And how the bloody hell had they gotten from Dumbledore wanting to push him up a few years to wanting to throw him out of school? What a mess. "Fine. Set up my appointments and I'll be there with bells on. It's not like I have a choice, now do I?"

Blinking the spots out of his eyes, Harry reminded himself for the fifth time that night that he really ought to keep his eyes closed when teleporting himself using lightning. It took a further moment to shake off the odd tingling in his limbs, still a sensation he found unusual even after a month of jumping all over Britain to fight Voldemort and his Death Eaters but a welcome change from the squeezed feeling of apparating. Then and only then did he assess the situation, trying to figure out what Moody had sent him to handle.

The Greengrass Estate, or what was left of it, burned in front of him. Whatever the Death Eaters had done here, they hadn't managed to disturb the ward stones, turning the Greengrass's own defenses against them: the wards blocked all inbound apparition and portkey travel, cutting them off from any hope of rescue. Thankfully, though, one of the house elves had been ordered to flee and seek help and had thought to come to Hogwarts. That elf had found Dobby, Dobby had found Harry, and Harry... well, wards weren't a problem that troubled Harry.

Pulling his invisibility cloak on and casting a flame-freezing charm, Harry slipped through a massive hole that had been blasted in the north wall and entered the house, moving slowly as he sought out signs of life. The first person he found was the corpse of a man he was guessing had been Mr. Greengrass, likely a victim of the killing curse given that his body had no marks on it. Mrs. Greengrass was a few feet away in the same state. But the question then became... where were their daughters?

Harry got a hint in the form of voices from further in the house: three gruff and distinctly male ones along with one shrieking, terrified female one. Holding out his wand, he tapped the tip against the floor and focused some of his magic down the length. While the Marauders had relied on layers and layers of charms work on

enchanted parchment, Harry had learned to do the same thing through pure magical brute force. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Even though the truth was quite the opposite, tendrils of lightning began to flicker out across the floorboards, drawing the layout of the house and marking out not four but five dots in the next room. Daphne Greengrass was up against the farthest wall, while her sister Astoria was in the middle of the room surrounded by... Draco Malfoy, Gregory Goyle, and Vincent Crabbe.

There was another high-pitched shriek and then the meaty slap of a fist meeting flesh. "Shut up, you little slag. The more you struggle, the more we'll make it hurt. And keep those eyes open or I'll crucio you again, Daphne. If we let you live through this, maybe next time you'll think twice before defying the Dark Lord the way your parents did."

Any doubt as to what was about to happen was dispelled when Harry heard a zipper being lowered. Gritting his teeth, he focused his will and the wand in his hand shifted into a massive warhammer. Oh, this would not do at all. Not one bit.

Passing through the doorway, Harry decided the two brutes would go first so he could take his time and enjoy Draco's death. Slowly circling around them, he winced as Draco used a series of low powered cutting curses to slice through Astoria's clothing, leaving her naked and bleeding from a series of thin cuts that crisscrossed her body. Harry's rage grew; no thirteen year-old was going to suffer through what Malfoy was planning for her. Not on his watch. Moving closer, he tugged down the hood on his cloak before tapping Crabbe on the shoulder. "Wotcher. Is this a private party?"

"Potter!"

"Wow. After nearly six years of school together, you actually remember my name. I'm shocked." Twirling the warhammer with a grace that seemed impossible for its size and weight, Harry brought his weapon up and slammed it into the frozen Death Eater's skull. The back caved in under the hard strike, killing Crabbe instantly. "Too bad nobody's going to remember your name after tonight." Pulling

Mjolnir free with a wet squelching noise, Harry lunged forward and took Goyle out of the equation with a swipe that caved in his chest and sent him flying across the room to hit the far wall. That just left... "Evening, Malfoy."

Jerking himself away from Astoria as if she'd suddenly transformed into one of Hagrid's skrewts, Malfoy tried and failed to combine a fierce glare with his furious efforts to tuck himself back into his pants. "Looks like you lot have a guardian angel. That's okay, we've already made our point." Smirking, Malfoy raised his wand and gave them a casual wave. "Have a good evening, ladies."

As Malfoy gathered his magic to him and tried to apparate away, Harry's lips twisted in a smirk of his own as he thrust his free hand out, gathering his power and waiting for a moment before pulling. There was a flicker of motion as the blonde-haired Death Eater momentarily disappeared before reappearing with a scream. "Oh, don't leave now. The party's just getting started, Draco."

Waving his hand, Harry conjured a robe and dropped it over Astoria's nude form before summoning her wand to him. Daphne was under a silencing charm and need to be unpetrified as well, but soon it was three of them against one Death Eater... and Harry was going to make sure that Draco Malfoy didn't escape to try something like this again. "Oh look, I found this extremely lifelike practice dummy. Who here wants to learn how to cast the Unforgivables?"

"Harry?" Blinking, Harry looked down into the wide silver eyes of Luna and shook his head to clear it. "Are you alright?"

How could he have been stupid enough to think he could come here and spend time around the Greengrass family, and not be assaulted by memories from his past? Harry nodded, though, knowing he couldn't actually explain his problem to Luna or any of the others without opening up another can of worms and revealing he'd lied in his interview with her. "Fine. She just reminds me of someone from you-know-who's memories."

Turning back to the girl waiting and watching him with wide eyes, Harry pasted a smile on his face. "It's nice to meet you, Astoria. Don't

mind me. I'm getting a little odd in my old age, like Dumbledore. Do you know where your sister is?"

"You're eleven, Harry. If you're getting weird it's because you're crazy, not because you're old. Even I'm smart enough to recognize that." Astoria led them through the house to the living room, where Hermione, Su, and Daphne were already settled. Harry and Hermione had split up earlier that day, Hermione flooing to Su's and then on to Daphne's while Harry picked up Luna. Evidently her companion for the evening hadn't taken as long to get ready... which was odd, given Su looked a great deal more sophisticated and made-up than Luna did. "Next time, you can wait by the floo by yourself, sister. Your friends are weird. And I want that galleon on my nightstand by tomorrow morning." Grumbling under her breath to herself, Astoria turned and left the room.

There was silence as Daphne rose from the couch, approaching Luna and circling her fellow blonde slowly. After two laps of long inspection, Daphne nodded to herself. "With a little work, you'll do. I suppose. You overload on shades of a single color too much; even if you are in Ravenclaw, we'll need to wean you off wearing this much blue at one time. But at least I'm being given good material to work with. I could have another Hermione on my hands."

Hermione bristled and glared from her spot beside Su on the couch. "Hey!"

"Hermione, darling, I love you but if I didn't think you'd put me in the hospital wing for it, I would stun you, give you a makeover, then burn all your clothes and replace them." Daphne paused and thought for a moment. "Quite possibly use the Imperius Curse to 'convince' you to use makeup each morning, too. Although I think there are will-weakening potions I could use instead that are slightly more legal. The only reason I'm not nagging you about your appearance is because Su seems to be making it her mission and she's a bit more patient with you than I'd be. I mean really, you came to dinner smelling like a locker room more times this term than I cared to count. Do you know what you're doing to my reputation?"

"I'm on the quidditch team! We practice before dinner!"

"So is Harry. And three other girls. And they all manage to smell decent when they show up to eat."

Deciding to rescue Daphne from a fight that shouldn't occur until both girls were old enough that mud and bikinis could be involved, Harry pulled a package out of his pocket and cancelled the shrinking charm. "Speaking of fashion... here you go, Daphne. Happy Christmas, albeit a few days late. I wanted to be here when you opened it so I could show you the charms on it."

Daphne snorted but took the present anyways, flipping it over in her hands a few times. "A likely story. Probably forgot to get me something and you're late because you had to stop at the Alley before coming here." A smile softened her pretend rebuke and she tore through the wrapping paper, letting it fall to the ground as she unfolded the cloak inside. Twisting it back and forth, she let out a soft coo as she admired it. "Harry, this is beautiful. Thank you!"

Draping it around Daphne's shoulders, Harry took her hand and guided it up to the catch. "Gryffindors go forward." The fabric rippled and turned from a deep blue to a brilliant Gryffindor red with gold trim. "The grass is always greener." And just as quickly, it turned back to the blue that accentuated Daphne's eyes. "I liked the blue with your eyes, but figured it was too close to Ravenclaw blue, so I gave you another option for at school."

"I suppose this is my cue to retrieve your present, hmm?" Daphne's new cloak billowed as she turned and headed for the Christmas tree, bending to retrieve a small package from beneath it. "Happy Christmas, Harry."

Harry was about to open his present when Hermione and Su surged up from the couch, dragging him over and pushing him down in the middle before piling two more presents in his lap and taking up position on either side of him. Starting with Hermione's first, he opened it to find what looked like a pair of rather sporty muggle sunglasses. "They're for quidditch. I got your prescription from your mum and used a magical optometrist to get the right lenses. Was a whole lot cheaper than a muggle would have been. Too bad I can't

charge my old friends a finder's fee and bring them to Diagon Alley for new glasses. I'd be rich..."

Switching to the sunglasses, Harry verified the world was just as clear albeit a good deal darker. Turning his head back and forth, they didn't slip an inch and he guessed there were some subtle sticking charms or something on the frames to keep them in place. "Wicked. Thanks, Hermione."

Su's present was a glass disc roughly as big around as his fist, contained in a thin gold band etched with runes. "It's a translation tool. You can run it over books in a foreign language and you'll see English. It only works on Mandarin, Cantonese, French, German, Italian, and Russian, but I think that's enough at your age, hmm?"

Considering he already knew most Scandinavian languages thanks to his special helper, that was more than enough in his opinion. "Wow. Thanks, Su. I've been meaning to look into some of the older magical traditions of China ever since you showed me that water spell of yours, but most of the books Hogwarts has aren't exactly accessible to those of us who don't know Chinese. So again, thank you."

"Hopefully you're saving the best for last or else we're going to have words, you and I." Grabbing a pillow from one of the other couches, Daphne placed it atop the coffee table before seating herself so she could watch Harry open her present. "Well, go on. Open it."

Harry eyed her oddly before unwrapping what turned out to be a fairly high-denomination gift voucher to Aurora Pets in Diagon Alley. "Wow. Erm, Daphne, I didn't spend anywhere near this much on your present..."

Running one hand along the outside of her new cloak, Daphne nodded. "I didn't think you would. You're a boy, after all, and your father isn't exactly the traditionalist sort. Learning experience, then. If you're going to mingle with the pureblood families, they're going to expect you to know certain things. Like that you should buy presents that reflect how much money you have, to avoid looking too thrifty. Although you shouldn't go too grand, because then you just look like

a show-off. Still, keep that in mind when my birthday rolls around in August, okay?"

"Don't worry, Harry, I'm not going to make you buy me expensive things." Harry had forgotten all about Luna, and looked back over his shoulder to find her hovering behind the couch. Reaching behind her neck, she unhooked something he hadn't even noticed because he'd become so accustomed to seeing on the other Luna: a butterbeer cork necklace. She was wearing two, actually, and one apparently had his name on it. Looping it around Harry's neck, she fastened the clasp and then gave him a quick hug. "I even kept it warm for you."

"Erm... thanks, Luna. It's very nice?"

Unlike the look Daphne was giving Luna at the moment...

Joe's Note: I just wanted to alert you lot to the fact that there is a forum up for this story. Go to my profile and my forums to see it. I'll check in there as often as I can to answer questions or just chat. My sister is also doing art of the story and so I'll hopefully be able to post some of that there soon too. And yes, I've deliberately shifted from the book-verse coed versions of Beauxbatons and Durmstrang to the female-only Beauxbatons and male-only Durmstrang. It's a universe difference, not a mistake on my part.

Also, the reference to written Cantonese in the previous chapter wasn't a mistake. Not only do Cantonese speakers write out words using the way they'd be pronounced in Cantonese rather than Mandarin, but there are a large number of unique characters in written Cantonese and a person who can read Standard Written Chinese will generally have problems with the grammar and vocabulary of written Cantonese. Ergo, coding them into the translator separately would allow Harry to read books in either.

"What time is it?"

"Tempus. 11:50."

"Thanks, Daphne, I don't think I could have done that on my own." Actually, Harry could have but it would have been difficult. Somehow, despite the one-sided dislike between the blondes, he'd ended up between Daphne and Luna on the couch with the latter was curled up against his side snoring softly while the former was merely leaning on him. "And seriously, thanks for the change of scenery. It was nice to get out of the house and spend time with my friends for the night."

Daphne wriggled a bit next to him, turning her head so she could stare up at him with sleepy blue eyes. He had done well, he decided; the cloak he'd purchased was almost an exact match. "Any time, Harry. Hermione seemed a bit... off... whenever I brought up Potter Place, though. How does she get along with your sisters? She's an only child, right?"

Turning his gaze back and forth, Harry studied the two heads resting on his chest, comparing the shades of blonde. Daphne was a much

deeper shade of honey blonde compared to Luna's white-blonde, but each seemed to be uniquely suited to match the rest of the girl's coloration. Then he realized Daphne had asked him a question. "Yeah, she's an only. And she gets along with them well enough. Better than I do, but I think that's because they're all girls. Much better than I do with Jasmine, but that's because Jasmine would curse her own foot off if Hermione asked her too. How about you and Astoria? When you're not bribing her to do stuff for you, that is?"

"Astoria and I are only three years apart but the age difference keeps us from really being friends. Back up for just a moment, though." Daphne looked over at their mutual muggleborn friend, perched precariously on the two-seater across from them and drooling slightly onto Su's hair. "What's this about Jasmine and Hermione? Hermione mentioned they were practicing quidditch against each other a lot, but..."

Crap. He was supposed to be keeping that a secret, so Hermione could brood about her sexuality and her pint-sized redheaded suitor in peace. But as long as the kneazle was out of the bag anyways, Harry figured maybe filling Daphne in could do some good. Merlin knew he didn't want to have long and thought-provoking conversations about whether or not Hermione should be with his sister.

Hermione with Su, on the other hand, was an idea he could get behind...

Harry shook himself, lest he get too interested in that idea and embarrass himself with two young ladies leaning against him. "No, my sister Jasmine seems to have latched onto Hermione. Hermione's not entirely sure what to make of it, apart from using it as an excuse to whine about how spectacular she's not. Personally, I don't care if my sister's interested in girls or boys, I don't care if my friend is interested in girls or boys... I just don't want them to end up hurting each other. Because I don't want to end up picking between friends and family."

"You know, you don't act like any other boy in our year. You're far too mature." Daphne grinned up at him. "Not that I'm complaining, mind

you, it's a nice change of pace compared to Malfoy, Weasley, and especially Longbottom. Still odd, though. Are you sure you're not, say, a vampire who was turned at the age of eleven? Maybe you found some way to kill your adult body and send your memories back in time to when you were younger so you could live life over again?"

Chuckling at the word for word repetition of what Hermione had asked a few days previously, Harry shook his head. "You've seen me in the sun, first of all. As for the second option... I swear I've never been an adult at any time in this or any other life." Honestly, killing himself and sending his memories back in time. Where did the girl come up with such ridiculous ideas?

"Drat. I was personally leaning toward the time-traveler option, although you're pale enough to be a vampire so that wasn't completely impossible. You could, after all, have some sort of pendant or anklet that protects you from the sun." Daphne repeated her spell and this time a perfect 12:00 emerged from her wand. "I do believe you owe me a kiss to celebrate the new year. Unless you want to wake up Luna, Su, or Hermione."

Damn. And he'd successfully avoided all three sprigs of randomly migrating magical mistletoe, too. Based on the look she was fixing him with, Harry didn't think waking up Su, Hermione, or especially Luna was an option that would lead to his continued good health, and so instead he did his best not to cringe as he leaned in and briefly pressed his lips against Daphne's.

How many years were pedophiles getting in Azkaban these days?

He knew it really wasn't fair to Daphne, or himself even, but while he could quite easily be friends and stay with those 'his age' in body most of the time, when it came to anything romantic, he rather keenly felt his mental years. He knew exactly what Daphne's body would look like in six years, having admired it often and received slaps upside the head from Ginny on numerous occasions because of it, and looking at her current preteen form reminded him of the unbridgeable chasm in their levels of mental maturity. He'd lived six years longer than she had, lost his virginity, done things that would probably make his parents blush, been engaged to be married... and

the extent of her love life to this point was probably just this awkward crush on him.

Merlin. Was there a spell he could use to accelerate the next five years somehow? Or at least the next three? He'd settle for fourteen year-old Daphne over eleven year-old Daphne. People had started pairing off a bit in his fourth year, meaning she wouldn't be of optimum age but would at least be old enough that people wouldn't think too much of it.

"Harry?" Looking down at the speaker, Harry raised an eyebrow and a light flush spread over Daphne's cheeks. "Are we going to discuss a certain letter your father received or is it just going to be this erumpent in the room for the near future?"

Actually, he would have preferred to let it be the 'erumpent in the room', personally. Harry groaned and leaned his head back against the back of the couch. "Not sure. Isn't this the sort of business your father and my father should be discussing? I'm not sure either of us is smart enough to make such an important decision about the future of the Houses of Potter and Greengrass..."

Daphne winced at the none-too-subtle barb toward her public attitude about marriage and a future husband. "I guess I deserve that. But... you don't get what it's like to be me. We're not dark like the Malfoys or Blacks and I've never heard my dad proposing we kill off the muggles or something, but that doesn't mean the Greengrasses don't keep to certain traditions. I'm not supposed to marry for love, I'm supposed to marry for the good of the family. And right now, I can't really ignore the fact that one of my closest friends is an unattached boy who's smart, of good blood, and powerful enough to take out three adult mountain trolls."

"I can, though. My father passed up who my grandparents wanted him to marry so he could be with my mother. My muggleborn mother, so my blood can't be that good by your standards. And my father may joke about me getting the contracts but he's not expecting me to accept any of them." Harry sighed, leaning over to rest his cheek against the top of Daphne's head. "Can't we just be friends for now? See what happens when we're older? I'm not ready to make such a

huge decision about my life at... well, I'm not even a teenager yet. If I'd accepted it when you sent it, I would have been engaged before even getting my first kiss."

Wide blue eyes greeted that statement as Daphne pulled away, staring up at him in disbelief. "Really? You've never kissed a girl before me?" She brought one hand up to her lips. "Wow." Her hand dropped, head shaking in disbelief. "Never?"

Harry rolled his eyes. "I'm eleven, Daphne. No, I'm not exactly running around kissing girls. I'm only one step past the 'girls are icky' stage." After all, he couldn't exactly tell her about kissing Cho Chang or Ginny Weasley, much less the fact that he'd had sex with the latter.

"Mmhmm. Feel free to think all other girls are 'icky'; that's fine with me. And I guess we can be just friends... for now." Daphne leaned back in, snuggling into his side. "You know, we should probably go find actual beds soon. And do something with Hermione and Su, because if they sleep like that all night, they're going to wake up with really bad neck pain."

Nodding, Harry wiggled himself free and drew his wand. A gentle flick had Su hovering an inch or two off the couch and he eased her away from Hermione, gently tipping his friend over to lie on her side for the moment. As he turned to float Su off to where Daphne had previously shown him the guest bedrooms were, a flicker of motion in the corner of his eye caught his attention. Looking over at Daphne, Harry stifled a chuckle. "Alright there, Daphne?"

Daphne's glare alternated between Harry and the thin blonde lying halfway across her lap, arms wrapped tightly around her waist. Harry's guess was that Luna hadn't taken kindly to being deprived of her pillow and had taken to using the next best thing: Daphne. "Keep laughing and I'll URK!" Luna squeezed Daphne a bit tighter, snuggling in closer to her new pillow.

Deciding not to wait and see what Daphne's threat actually was, Harry hustled Su out of the room.

The morning of January 5th dawned bright and cold, but thankfully it wasn't as hectic as it could have been. As much as Harry liked the Weasleys (well, most of them), their last minute rush to pack had always irritated him. Perhaps it was something Petunia Dursley had instilled in him, but saving such an important task for when you had the most to worry about and the least amount of time to accomplish things just seemed foolish.

With his siblings dressed and fed, his father off to work, and his and Hermione's trunks packed and ready to go, all that was left to do was round up his mother and floo over to King's Cross to board the train. It took him a minute, but Harry eventually tracked her down in the study, hunched over a piece of paper. "You ready to go, Mum?"

Lily looked up from her work for a moment before shaking her head. "Let me just finish these letters. I want to send these off from the international owl office in Diagon Alley after I bring you to King's Cross."

"Oh?" Peering down over her shoulder, Harry got a look at the addresses on the envelopes she'd laid out for the letters she was writing. "The Crowley Academy? Durmstrang Institute? The Korean Academy for the Magically Elite? The Delhi Conservatory? Wow, if I didn't know better I'd think you were trying to get rid of me. Only one you missed is Beauxbatons. Forget the address?"

Pausing for a moment, Lily let out a quiet snicker before her quill began to scratch over the parchment again. "I suppose I could write them and the Salem Witches Institute, but then we'd have to invest in a few potions next summer if we wanted you to meet the entrance requirements. But if you really want to be my eldest daughter instead of my eldest son..."

Harry blinked as his mind took a moment to wrap around that. Beauxbatons was an all-girl's school here? Huh. That was weird. While most of his attention had been on staying alive in fourth year, he definitely remembered Pārvatī ditching him at the Yule Ball to dance with a boy from Beauxbatons who she'd dated for the remainder of fourth year and then some.

Actually, now that he thought about it, the idea did have some potential to it. He could get away from the headmaster for a bit, let Neville bumble through the Chamber of Secrets incident while he spent the year with Fleur Delacour and other lovely French ladies. And lovely ladies they were indeed. Much lovelier than a basilisk that went around the school terrorizing people. And much, much lovelier than that buffoon of a DADA professor they'd get stuck with: Gilderoy Lockhart.

Tempting as it was, though, he couldn't just walk away. Who knew what would happen to Hermione, Su, and Daphne without him there to protect them? Not to mention the fact that he'd miss out on Jasmine and Rose's first year, and his first opportunity to make friends with Luna, Lara, and maybe even Ginny. If she was less of a Neville fan girl these days, that was. "No thank you. I'm quite happy being the Potter heir and not the Potter heiress. Why are you writing to all these other schools, though?"

"Because the headmaster has put conditions on you returning to Hogwarts next year. Who knows who this friend of his is, or what his real goal is in making you attend these sessions?" His mother gestured to the array of letters spread out before her on the desk. "I want a bargaining chip ready before next fall... and if worst comes to worst, I'm sure that Rensaren would make you eligible for the Korean Academy."

Hopefully. Actually, Harry mused, it might take a full revelation of his magical potential to qualify for attendance at the Korean Academy for the Magically Elite, not to mention learning to speak Mandarin and Nihongo. Su was a phenomenally brilliant girl and she'd been rejected for admission, but considering it served the best of the best of the combined magical populations of China, the Koreas, Japan, Mongolia, and southern Russia... there were a lot of bodies competing for a limited number of seats. They truly were the premiere institution of magical learning in the world, despite Hogwart's assertions to the contrary, and most of its graduates went on to accomplish great things not only in their home country but in the world at large.

Harry decided to give his mother a hand and used his wand to neatly fold each letter and stuff it into the appropriate envelope, securing it with a dab of wax and the Potter family seal. "Well, if you're done plotting your next move in the chess game called my life, Hermione and I need to go back to Hogwarts, at least for now."

Cursing, Lily checked the small clock on her desk before pushing her chair back and rising to her feet. "Right you are. Everything packed?" Harry nodded. "Of course it is, you're getting even better than I am about picking up after yourself. Hermione's ready to go too, I assume?" Another nod. "Let's go then."

Biting his tongue, Harry decided against pointing out that they were waiting on her and followed obediently as she descended the stairs. He and Hermione had each shrunk and pocketed their trunks for the return to school and so the only thing waiting in front of the fireplace was an impatient muggleborn and a pouting half-blood. "Maybe I'll see you this summer? You can come over and we can fly again?"

"Sure, Jasmine." Before Hermione could continue, though, Jasmine took advantage of what she thought was an empty room and latched onto the brunette, delivering a hug and a peck on the cheek, neither of which Hermione returned. Then she pulled back, only to catch sight of her mother and older brother. Blushing bright red, Jasmine raced between them and out of the room. "Not a word, Harry Potter. Not one word."

Harry raised his hands in surrender. "Okay. Besides, talking about how you ended up curled up with Su in HER bed at Daphne's house is much more interesting anyways."

That induced both a blush and a growl and Harry took a step backwards, slipping halfway behind his mother for protection. "I told you, I sleepwalk. I don't know why I went in Su's room or decided to borrow part of her bed, but... you know what, it was completely harmless and I wouldn't need to explain myself to you even if it was something dirty!" Huffing, Hermione grabbed a handful of floo powder out of the dish on the mantle and pitched it into the fire. "Platform Nine and Three-Quarters!"

Inching out from behind his mother, Harry shook his head. "That girl is far too easy to tease. Oh well. It's payback for her needling me when I got those contracts. She deserves it."

"Uh huh. Say that again when you're not hiding behind me. Possibly to her face." Harry shuddered and his mother grabbed a handful of powder for herself, tossing it into the fire. "Hurry up, Harry, or you're going to be late for the train. Platform Nine and Three-Quarters!"

Harry's jaw dropped as his mother disappeared into the flames. "Wait a minute. We would have been there half an hour ago if you'd been ready!" Realizing he was talking to thin air, Harry just shook his head and took some powder for himself. "Platform Nine and Three-Quarters!"

Watching the rather bland countryside roll by as the Hogwarts Express made its way back towards Scotland, Harry yawned and tuned out the idle conversation going on between Hermione, Su, and Daphne. The dynamic duo, as Harry had taken to thinking of them, had broken out his present about half an hour into the trip and were bookending Daphne as they went through some of the new charms it contained.

A burst of red light filled the cabin and Harry turned just in time to get a face full of rose petals. There was absolute silence for a long moment before the girls started giggling madly, taking in the newly redecorated compartment. Sighing, he rose to his feet, spilling a large pile of petals from his lap onto the floor. "And on that note, I'm going to take a walk. You lot have fun cleaning that one up."

Ignoring their pleading, Harry exited the compartment and closed the door behind him. Who cared if they didn't know how to vanish things yet? They should have thought of that before conjuring up a ridiculously large amount of rose petals. He wasn't their maid, after all.

Walking down the corridor, Harry occasionally peeked into the compartments as he passed. Holiday spirit was evidently still in full swing, with most of his peers busy showing off their favorite

acquisitions to their friends. It almost made Harry feel guilty for not sharing the Marauder's Map and the true nature of his new pocket watch with his friends. Almost. After all, a boy had to have some secrets and while the girls didn't seem to be the type who'd rat him out, he also knew what jealousy or even just a bad mood could drive a friend to do.

Cough Ron cough.

As he passed through to the next car, Harry came face to face with the most mysterious girl in his year: Winifred Burkle. After her rather memorable sorting, he'd put her on the 'to watch' list but it'd fallen by the wayside as he reconnected with Hermione, forged closer friendships with Daphne and Su, fought trolls, and played quidditch. Now, though, he was stuck on a train with hours to go before he reached his destination and Burkle was conveniently present for conversation. Harry held out his hand. "Hi. I don't think we've really met before. I'm Harry Potter."

Icy blue eyes flicked from his face to his outstretched hand and back again. "I know. Your name was announced when you were sorted, as well as during every shared Gryffindor-Slytherin class prior to Christmas." Flushing, Harry pulled his hand back with a frown. Well that was just rude. What was wrong with introducing yourself to people you didn't actually know? "You and your kind do not interest me in the slightest, therefore I ignore you. However, someone I am doing business with wishes to meet you in exchange for services rendered to me. You will follow me."

Burkle turned to walk back in the direction from which she'd come and Harry chuckled incredulously at her brusqueness. She insulted him and then expected him to do something for her? What, was Snape giving out social interaction lessons to his first years now? "And if I don't?"

"Then I will bring you to her using as much force as necessary to subdue and transport you. The choice is yours, but whether you come willingly or not, you will come with me." She shot a glare back over her shoulder at him and Harry, despite everything he'd seen and done up to that point, shivered. And when Burkle took a step down

the hall, Harry was right behind her. Hopefully when they got to this mysterious 'her', the creepy Slytherin wouldn't be staying. Harry hadn't felt afraid of something in a long time and it wasn't an emotion he enjoyed the return of.

Wait. What if whoever this creepy girl worked for was worse? Come to think of it, apart from the gender, Harry knew nothing about Burkle's patron. His mind started racing, supplying possibilities as to who could command someone that even made him afraid. Dumbledore was awfully accepting of unusual students. What if there was a vampire or demon of some kind among the students? He eyed Burkle uncertainly. Demon would certainly explain her lack of people skills...

Harry slammed into an unyielding form and fell back onto his arse as Burkle came to an abrupt stop in front of a particular compartment. "In here." She opened the door as Harry struggled back to his feet, swaying slightly. Merlin almighty, that had felt like taking a concussion hex to the chest. That demon theory of his was looking better and better. As he took a few deep breaths to catch his wind, Harry shamelessly eavesdropped on the two girls inside the compartment. "I have finished my task. You will notify me when your mother recovers the information I desire."

"Of course, of course. I'll owl you whatever she sends so you don't need to be seen talking to me." Burkle emerged from the compartment a moment later, giving him one last cold stare before pushing past him and wandering off again. Harry hesitated, studying the compartment's occupant through the open door, until she addressed him directly. "Come in, Harry. Sit, talk."

Blaise Zabini. It wasn't great power that controlled Burkle, or at least not power in the sense that Harry was used to. The power of information, of knowledge desired, was evidently enough to bind her to the will of a girl her own age. Harry studied the dark-skinned girl as he moved to sit across from her. Now that they were closer, he could see definite resemblances to the Blaise he'd left behind in his home universe... similarities in the eye shape, cheekbones, and jaw, the way she held herself, and the slightly calculating look to the gaze she fixed on him. It made Harry wonder what he'd see in three years

when Beauxbatons came to Hogwarts; would each male student have a female analog or would they still be male and attending another school?

"Harry Potter. It's a pleasure to finally meet you in person." Blaise's lips quirked up a small smile as she crossed one leg over the other, eyeing him speculatively. "I take it you received my family's letter over the holidays?"

Harry nodded. "Shouldn't you have met me in person before, I don't know, trying to get your family to sell you to me?"

Rather than the anger he was expecting, Blaise's smile just grew a bit at his barb. Maybe she found her parents' actions amusing as well? "Touché. But, what's done is done. So, what did you think?" Harry raised an eyebrow and regarded her in silence, waiting for her to elaborate. What did he think about... what? The current werewolf legislation? The price of newt eyes? Lavender Brown's new haircut? "Of my family's offer, that is. I thought the dowry was generous, considering the rank of my family compared to your other suitors."

Uh... huh. There was something incredibly disquieting to Harry about how easily young pureblood witches could talk about businesslike future marriages at such a young age. "Well, it's not exactly like the Potters are hurting for money. The size of the dowry doesn't matter to me as much as the person it comes with. I don't know how you knew about Daphne and Luna's contracts to compare to..."

"A copy goes on file with the Department of Magical Records and Contracts when their parents send the letter to you. My step-father works in the department and saw them come in, then wrote down the details for comparison."

"...okay, that's a bit creepy. But as I was saying, Daphne and Luna are friends. I've never even met you before today. So I'll tell you the same thing I told Daphne when she pushed me about the contract she sent. Right now, I'm looking for friends." Harry leaned forward, patting Blaise on the knee. "If something happens between me and a friend in the future, then it'll happen. But I'm not interested in tying

myself down, especially when I'm eleven. So if you're really interested..."

Blaise shook her head, daintily grabbing his wrist and removing his hand from her knee. "Pass. You were a good candidate, but you're not the only boy in our year. I didn't think you'd go for it because of your parents, but Mother thought otherwise. I was right. Oh well. She'll need to pay off Miss Burkle for her help finding you, but that's not my problem. I'll see you in class."

That was it? Harry almost felt insulted. While he was glad he wouldn't need to expand his little group to incorporate another girl and a third suitor at that, hearing that Blaise's interest in him was strictly business was... scratch almost, it was insulting. But seeing as how he was in the clear now, Harry decided to make a strategic retreat rather than argue and potentially convince her he was a good bet again by accident. "Still can't believe you basically hired someone to find me on the train for you. You could have walked down the hall and found my compartment, or I was planning to track you down within the next day or two so we could have this talk."

"I could have. But it was a good excuse to start a working relationship with Miss Burkle." Blaise's odd little smile returned as she gestured to the door. "Ta."

Now that he'd been dismissed both subtly and directly, Harry decided to take the hint and rose to his feet, exiting the compartment. Closing the door behind him, he made his way back towards his own compartment, amused to find the rose petals still present when he returned. Then again, he realized after checking his pocket watch, he hadn't been gone long. "So, what happened to cleaning up in here?"

"Harry!" Daphne launched herself from between the other two girls, hugging him with uncharacteristic enthusiasm, even for her. "Please, teach one of them the spell to get rid of these damn petals. All the other compartments in this car are full, so there's nowhere we can move to, and the smell is getting overpowering."

While Hermione and Su weren't quite as desperate, Harry could tell from their expressions that it was starting to get to them too. "And

here I thought girls liked flowers?" Daphne crossed her arms over her chest, fixing him with a magnificent pout, and Harry sighed. They were stuck with the petals because the spell was above their grade level... as was the spell to get rid of them. Even just showing the girls how to do the spell would reveal that he knew how to do even more advanced magic... but at this point, they probably knew as much. "Alright, I'll teach one of you how to do the spell..."

Hermione's hand shot up as she wiggled forward, sitting on the edge of her seat. "I'll do it!"

"...but I get to transfigure the clothes of that person into a maid's outfit." Hermione's hand abruptly dropped as her expression shifted from excitement to revulsion; despite having to wear a skirt daily as part of her uniform, this version of her was a lot like her original counterpart (well, pre-Ron) in that she greatly preferred slacks to skirts. Evidently she was willing to suffer through the rose petals' cloying smell if it meant she could keep her legs covered. He looked over at Su and then Daphne, neither of whom looked too thrilled with the idea either. "What? Maybe next time you'll think before casting a spell you can't undo. So, any takers?"

Daphne looked over at Su and then both turned their attention to Hermione, who shook her head vehemently. Sighing, Daphne held out one hand towards Su. "Roshambo?"

"Works for me. Ro! Sham! Bo!"

Holding out one arm, Harry watched Daphne make the short hop from the train to the platform, her white lace-trimmed black skirt puffing out a bit as she moved. Letting his eyes wander up and down her, he came to a rather disturbing conclusion: Daphne at eleven filled the snugly-fitting outfit just about as well as Ginny had when he'd transfigured one of her robes into the same costume. Merlin. Forget turning into a pedophile while surrounded by younger versions of a number of his female friends, maybe the tendencies had always been there. He let out a self-deprecating chuckle, only to grunt as Daphne elbowed him in the ribs. "What? I wasn't laughing at you, I swear."

"Uh huh. Laugh it up, Harry. Just remember, I know where you sleep and the boys' dorms don't have a spell to keep us girls out." Shivering, Daphne pressed herself tight against his side. "Now hurry up and escort me to a carriage. I'm freezing in this ridiculous getup."

Harry nodded, taking pity on her and shrugging off his own cloak so he could wrap it around her. That would cut down on some of the wind chill, although she'd still suffer from the actual cold. Warming charms to both the cloak and his jumper and slacks took care of that problem for the most part, though, and they were both a good deal more comfortable as Su and Hermione joined them, the quartet heading for one of the empty, thestral-drawn carriages.

A green-clad figure near one of them caught Harry's attention and he diverted the group in a new direction as Professor McGonagall beckoned him to approach. "Professor?"

"Mister Potter. Misses Granger, Greengrass, and Li." McGonagall looked them each up and down before sighing and relaxing slightly. "Shall I take it from the lack of students needing to be tended to by Madam Pomfrey that you had an uneventful journey?"

Harry gasped, bringing one hand up to his chest. "Professor! You wound me! You act like I'm the one who starts the trouble. It's not my fault that purebloods can't seem to keep their bigoted opinions to themselves around me. Or that they tend to get injured shortly after expressing their opinions."

"I'm sure, Mister Potter." McGonagall went to leave but froze, abruptly turning back around to stare at Daphne. "Miss Greengrass, what ARE you wearing?"

Blushing, Daphne looked down before drawing Harry's cloak more tightly around her body. "Hermione, Su, and I were experimenting with charms on the train. We needed Harry to teach us the vanishing spell so we could get rid of some conjured rose petals, and he decided we needed a reminder not to attempt spells too complicated for us in the future."

McGonagall's gaze shifted from the blushing blonde to Harry. "I see. Five points to Gryffindor, Potter, for your advanced, albeit unusual, garment transfiguration. And another five points for reminding them why our material is taught in a certain order." Pulling out her wand, she flicked it and restored the blue dress Daphne had been wearing, the blonde shrugging off Harry's cloak as her own was returned to her. "Now find a carriage and I'll see you all up at the school."

As McGonagall departed, Harry was surprised to see Hermione pouting. He arched a brow and the brunette sidled up next to him. "What? It was a cute outfit. It worked on her."

"Uh huh. Were you appreciating the outfit, or appreciating the view?" Hermione looked confused and so Harry elaborated. "You know. In a Jasmine sort of way?"

Hermione punched his shoulder hard.

Harry bite his lip to avoid crying out. Damn that hurt. He really needed to learn to stop picking on her while in arm's reach.

Joe's Note: Please, for the love of God, even if you never read another author's note for any story ever again... READ THIS CHAPTER'S NOTE! Ahem. That being said, this is version 1.75 of the story. Not enough to justify calling it a complete new version or asking all you all to totally reread it. So while you can if you want, and there a few little bits of humor added here and there, those of you who want to just dive right into the new stuff mainly need to know this: the Potter and Black families have been severely shrunk. Harry now has only his two eldest sisters, Rose and the oh-so-amusing Jasmine, while Sirius's only child is his daughter Cassiopeia, who is the same age as Rose, Jasmine, Luna, and Ginny. Since I didn't want to go through a yearly ritual of having Harry being shepherd to a freakin' herd of Potters and Blacks, and some of the others would be too young to really matter anyways, I nuked 'em like a Hot Pocket at lunch time. So... Jasmine and Rose Potter, Cassie Black. Get it? Got it? Good.

"Welcome back to another year at Hogwarts. Literally, that is, not another school year, although it does sometimes feel like time flies that quickly. Alas, there are six more months of class work in your future before you complete your academic year." There were a chorus of groans to accompany that and Dumbledore's eyes twinkled as he looked down at the student body from his seat at the head table. "Now, while I don't wish to delay this delicious meal for too terribly long, there is one very important announcement I feel I should share with you."

While the student body by and large continued to chatter, knowing at least the prefects would catch the message and relay it on if it was something that was actually of import to them, Harry waved his hand to shush his friends as he gave his full attention to Dumbledore. After all, this was another deviation in the timeline from his perspective. Nothing interesting had happened between his Christmas visits to the mirror and... wait. Was this where they would find out Snape was replacing Hooch for the February quidditch match between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff? Oh, that was no big deal then.

"...the upcoming Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff match will be postponed." Wait, what? That grabbed everyone's attention, not just

Harry's, and the volume in the Great Hall quickly dropped to nothing. "Instead, the Hufflepuffs and the Slytherins will play on February 22, while the Gryffindors and Hufflepuffs instead play on May 2. The reason for the delay..."

Here, Dumbledore paused for a moment, twinkling eyes wandering over the crowd before landing on Harry and Hermione. "...is that the Department of Magical Games and Sports heard about the most unorthodox gear and tactics used by our very own Gryffindors during their last game and is most eager to see both in action. Alas, several of the department's biggest names will be out of the country in February, so they have agreed instead to descend upon us in May. I hope you will all make them feel welcome. But now, Hogwarts, with an open heart and an empty stomach, I say unto you in the words of my friend, Takeshi Kaga... allez manger!"

With a flourish of Dumbledore's hand, food appeared on the four long house tables and the volume immediately jumped to near deafening levels as the students dug in, eagerly discussing the news. Harry's fellow first years scattered up the table as the other six members of the quidditch team descended on their end, more than a little excited by the news. "Bloody hell, Harry, do you know what this means?" Wood rubbed his hands together eagerly, too agitated to bother with the food on the table. "If they're sending the senior members of the DMGS... two or three of them are pro team owners. It'd be like being scouted. It'd be better than being scouted!"

Harry felt the urge to have a bit of fun at his captain's expense, knowing that playing keeper professionally was the boy's greatest ambition. "Actually, to be fair, Wood? They're coming to scout Hermione and me. You're just sort of... there. They might even order you grounded for the match so they can see Hermione play keeper."

Blood draining from his face, Wood's jaw dropped. "Bloody hell. You're right." Frantically looking around the table, his eyes jumped from one member of the team to the next. "You two work better together so I couldn't just... wait... wait... Alicia! You trained with Charlie last year while you were just a reserve, right? So... you could replace Potter as seeker, and I could put a Weasley at chaser, and the wonder twins could be our beaters!" The Weasley twins shot

Wood a glare that threatened horribly embarrassing retribution for such an act and he gulped before turning to the trio of chasers. "Or Alicia could take seeker, Angelina or Katie could sit, and they could be chasers?"

"That's not really fair to the others, though." Hermione wilted under the look Wood bestowed upon her before steeling herself and glaring. "What? It's not! It's your fault you got knocked out last game and I played so well they want to see me. Why should the rest of the team get punished and shuffled because of you? No, I'm playing keeper or nothing. And if you don't want to lead from the bench for one game, you can explain to our visitors why they came all the way out here for nothing." Huffing, she turned away from Wood and began to pile food on her plate.

Harry could see the struggle playing out in Wood's mind... did he do what was best for himself by ensuring he was in the game as the keeper so he could be seen by these important men? Or did he do what was best for the team and house by riding the bench, since that was the only way for Hermione to start without shuffling most of the others? Harry decided to help his captain out a bit with the decision. "You're not going to change her mind."

Glancing back and forth between Hermione and Harry a few times, Wood slumped. "No?"

"She's stubborn. And she's right. It's not really fair. Plus Hermione and I are too small to be beaters, and I don't think I have the arm to be a chaser." Wood sighed in defeat and nodded, and Harry perked up as he went into his bag and pulled out a piece of parchment and a quill. "Now, since Hermione is going to be out on the pitch instead of you and will be calling plays for the chasers... I have a few ideas for you to look at."

Wood arched a brow as Harry sketched out a rough ellipse on the paper, adding a trio of Xs and some arrows to denote the players and movement. "I thought you weren't a chaser, Potter."

Shrugging, Harry added a few more lines and then looked up. "I'm not. Doesn't mean I can't know a few things. You remember who my dad

is, right? James Potter, star chaser of Gryffindor? Almost went pro?" Wood nodded and Harry sighed in relief at the acceptance of his flimsy story. Ginny was the one who'd actually created these plays, not his father, and Harry wasn't sure exactly how he'd react to seeing other girls playing out the moves formerly only used by his beloved and her hand-picked wingmen. Oh well. He'd cross that bridge when he came to it. "Now, this is something they came up with to keep from blatching when the other team tries the Hawkshead Attacking Formation. It's called Catch, and..."

Days passed, then weeks, then months. Winter bled into spring and the snow that suffocated the Hogwarts grounds melted away to refill the lake, the water being soaked up by plants as the song of the green echoed across the land. Classes proceeded exactly as Harry remembered them, the only real difference in his life being that his quidditch practices focused on drilling new chaser tactics into Hermione and the Flying Foxes, as he'd jokingly started calling them, rather than practicing moves for his own position.

A quill scratched faintly against parchment, forming familiar runes under his supervision, and Harry amended that. There were two real differences between his past life and this one: quidditch practice and the fact that he now held tutoring sessions.

Harry sighed as he watched further elder futhark runes emerge from Cordelia's quill. He should have expected someone to lean on him for this sort of assistance, especially after admitting in an interview that he knew a goodly amount of what Þrúðr did. It was a bit of a no-brainer, really, that he would be an excellent resource for Ancient Runes... perhaps the best in the school. Cordelia, much to the disgust of her peers, had gotten to him first and sunk her claws in to secure most of the prime study slots for her own use.

Not that he especially minded Cordelia monopolizing his time. Harry leaned a bit further to his left, ostensibly to check the question in the book against the answer she was scrawling on the worksheet assigned by Professor Babbling. In reality, he simply enjoyed the view afforded him by the fact that Cordelia often doffed her house tie and vest as soon as class ended for the day, releasing the top two or

three buttons of her blouse as well as she let her metaphorical (and sometimes literal) hair down. Since he was only eleven as far as she knew and 'too young' for that sort of thing, it probably never even dawned on her how much he would be enjoying the view she provided him.

For once, he could admire a girl and not feel guilty about it, and so Harry took advantage of it as often as possible. Fifteen to his mental seventeen was on the lower end of the acceptable range as far as he was concerned, but it was a very welcome change from the ten and eleven-year olds who expressed an interest in him in one way or another. Eyes raking eagerly over the pale flesh of her breasts, Harry paused and contemplated a series of dark freckles on the upper slope of her left breast before tilting his head a hair to the right. From this angle, it almost looked like Odin's Wain...

Suddenly, the doors swung open with a bang and the volume in the Great Hall jumped from whispers of studying group to a louder rumble of outright conversation. With great effort, Harry managed to pull his attention away from Cordelia's cleavage and looked up to find a girl in a Hufflepuff uniform stomping through the hall, muttering under her breath. It took Harry a moment to properly recognize her without the mop of red hair she'd had when they first met, now sheered down to a short fuzz covered her head. "Candace?"

Harry rose from the bench in a daze, waving off Cordelia's protests as he crossed the hall. What the hell had happened to the poor girl? That wasn't the haircut of a girl in the mood to try something new, that was... that was the hairstyle of someone dyed her hair in her sleep and she had to cut it to get the blue out. Or someone with spell damage. Or maybe something had removed a bunch of her hair for her and so the rest had to go too. Harry compared the two calendars in his head. Norbert. The Norwegian Ridgeback had taken out a chunk of Hagrid's beard with a small burp of flame in his original universe. Had Candace fallen victim to Hagrid's newest pet as well?

Waiting until she threw herself down in a seat, Harry sidled up behind her and leaned in so his lips were near her ear. She stiffened at his presence before relaxing and pulling books out of her bag, intent on

ignoring him just like all the others staring at her at the moment. Harry wasn't going to let her, though. "Interesting new look, Wiedmaier."

"Thank you. I like it." Candace pulled out a pot of ink and a quill, unrolling some parchment and cracking open one of her books. "Now, is there anything else or will you leave me alone now?"

Chuckling, Harry straightened up. "As you wish. Oh, and Candace?" The redhead froze, her quill halfway to the parchment, waiting for his words. "Give Hagrid and Norbert my regards, okay?"

Candace's jaw dropped as she turned to look back over her shoulder at him. "How..?"

"Didn't you know? I'm Harry Potter. I know everything." Winking, Harry flicked his wrist and sent his wand jumping to his hand. Waving it over Candace's head, he mumbled a charm he'd learned from Charlie Weasley in his old universe and focused on what the Hufflepuff had looked like when they'd met in Hagrid's hut back before Christmas. New hair burst forth from Candace's follicles, the strands growing longer and longer until the tips brushed against her collarbone. It was a bit more than before, but she could always shorten it again to suit her tastes.

Tucking his wand back into its holster, Harry made his way back over to Cordelia and reclaimed his seat. "Now, where were we?"

Fiddling with the straps on his shin guard, Harry frowned. While they were smaller and lighter than the monstrous ones Hermione wore when she played keeper, they still felt huge compared to the loaner set of thin brown dragonhide pads he'd used for the Gryffindor versus Slytherin match. But if they saved him from a broken leg, he couldn't really complain. His biceps and thighs felt distressingly bared compared to his shins and forearms, but that was life. His dad and Sirius had run through a few variations but failed to come up with something that both had joints and was flexible enough to give a player a full range of mobility, and being able to survive bludger hits was useless if the seeker couldn't grab the snitch. Grabbing his helmet, twin to Hermione's, he slipped it on and looked up at his teammates. "Ready?"

Angelina nodded and laughed, flipping a crisp up into the air. Her dark hair swished gently as she ducked under it, letting it fall neatly into her mouth. After chewing and swallowing, the leader of the Flying Foxes smiled at Harry. "I am. With you and Hermione out there, the three of us barely have to do anything."

"Funny, Angelina." Harry stuck out his tongue; the three had relaxed and opened up a bit more to him over the past few months. The Weasley twins were still oddly distant to him, perhaps because they simply didn't care to lower themselves to hanging out with a first year? Harry couldn't really explain it, but decided not to let it bother him. He had plenty of other people who enjoyed his company. "Just remember, it's you three versus me. First to one fifty wins. So unless you're that eager to get a Harry Makeover, I'd fly hard."

Stealing one last crisp from Angelina, Katie patted him on the back as she passed. "Please. We're so going to whoop you. By this time Monday, you're going to be begging for a boys' uniform back." Biting her crisp in half, she looked over at their new starting keeper. "You ready, Hermione? Last chance to change your mind and give Oliver his position back."

Hermione snorted, yanking on a helmet that matched Harry's in construction if not in design, hers bearing a roaring lioness while his was emblazoned with a griffin. "Gryffindors go forward, Katie. So let's get out there before Hooch decides we're taking too long and makes us forfeit the match. That'd be an embarrassing end to the DMGS's visit, huh?"

Suitably chastised, the girls handed their snacks over to the waiting Wood and grabbed their brooms as the Weasley twins each brought a broom up to rest on one shoulder and a beater's bat on the other. As they stepped out into the sunlight, Harry could hear Lee Jordan announcing them one by one. "...chasers Katie Bell, Angelina Johnson, and Alicia Spinnet. Playing beater are Fred and George Weasley... and don't ask me which is which, because even I don't know. At seeker is Hogwarts' own new wonder boy, Harry Potter. And starting at keeper and making the team captain himself ride the bench today... Hermione Granger!"

"You know, we really ought to look into getting some speakers set up here. Play some music to pump up the crowd." Hermione grinned over at Harry as they made their way out, following behind the Weasley twins as they approached the center of the pitch. "We will... we will... ROCK YOU!"

Harry laughed outright at the concept as his vivid imagination went to work, picturing an entire stand full of Gryffindors screaming along to Queen songs. "You know... it's not an entirely bad idea. We should talk to McGonagall and have her talk to the headmaster about it. Be a great way to mess with the Slytherins, which means she should like it."

"Professor McGonagall, Harry."

"Yes, MOTHER."

Hooch too proved herself to be a pureblood, failing to recognize Hermione's follow up gesture as something rude. There was the standard warning about a clean game as the six chasers formed up around the white-haired referee and then the whistle shrilled sharply as Hooch tossed the ball into the air. Angelina's fingertips brushed against the quaffle, sending it spiraling towards Katie.

The ball touched Katie's hand.

Katie pulled the ball in, tucking it against her body as she took off. Cutting off Angelina with a move so close that the dark-skinned girl nearly got a face full of bristles, Katie rolled and rocketed between two Hufflepuff chasers as she gained altitude, heading down the pitch at top speed. "...and the Gryffindors are off to a good start, showing it's not just Potter and Granger that help them win games. Bell slips between Macavoy and Applebee, making a beeline for Fleet and the Hufflepuff rings." Harry grinned as he watched Katie close in on the poor petrified Hufflepuff keeper, weaving back and forth as she closed in on her target. "She jukes left... right... left... she throws... SCORE!"

Chuckling as he watched the Hufflepuffs try to collect their dignity and the quaffle, Harry floated lazily past one of the Gryffindor stands and high fived Katie as she passed. Looking down at his peers, an inane thought popped into Harry's mind: they needed a mascot. If the Irish National Team could have leprechauns and the Bulgarians could have Veela, why couldn't Gryffindor have something to inspire the crowd? A griffin... would probably end up mauling Malfoy and being put down by McNair in short order. Same with a lion. Hmm. Harry eyed a clump of older girls with red and gold paint splashed on their faces, cheering and waving red and gold pom-poms. Well, they weren't quite Veela...

A figure in yellow and black rocketed past, her blonde hair slapping noisily against the side of Harry's helmet, and he wheeled around to watch her go. While they couldn't cast any spells during the game, there was nothing that prohibited them from charming their helmets ahead of time so they could communicate easily during the game. "Hey Hermione... Pop Goes the Weasel?"

Hermione nodded as she began to drift forward, voice sounding clearly in his ears as the charms on his helmet made it sound like they were sitting together in the common room study instead of halfway across the pitch from each other. "Dibs on the punching. You know I've got the better right jab." That she did, Harry had to admit. He'd felt it enough times, after all.

Leaning forward, Harry took off in pursuit of Applebee as Hermione began to pick up speed, racing head-on at the Hufflepuff chaser. The blonde waggled to the left and then the right, trying to shake Hermione's kamikaze run, but each time the Gryffindor keeper corrected her own course. "I don't know what Granger and Potter are up to but if they fail, the rings are completely unprotected and it's an easy ten points for... OH!" At the last second, Hermione shot past Applebee on the Hufflepuff's right, just as Harry made the same pass to the left. Her arm shot out, punching the ball out of the chaser's possession and sending it right into Harry's waiting hands. "Holy hell, I've seen the chasers do something like that, but never the keeper and the seeker! What in the world will that pair come up with next?"

There was a whistle as the Hufflepuffs descended on Madame Hooch, protesting the move, but since Hermione hadn't actually hit Applebee and it was hard to prove intent, there was no blatching call and the game quickly resumed. Hermione whipped the ball up the pitch to Alicia, who waited for the other two chasers to form up before starting her own run on the goals.

After her little show, the Hufflepuffs evidently thought Hermione was a greater threat than Wood and she quickly found both bludgers batted her way in rapid succession. One bounced off her left shin as she rolled her broom to bring the fat pad into position, the other deflected as she batted it away with her right blocker. Both beaters received obscene gestures and Harry was momentarily worried Hermione would abandon the scoring area to chase them down and deliver payback, but she kept her head in the game and settled for glaring at them from her perch in front of the rings.

Leaving the other players to their own devices for a bit, Harry pulled his attention away from the battle over the quaffle and made slow circuits of the pitch as he looked for the snitch. On his fourth time past the professors' box, he finally took the time to look down into it. His family was there, all four decked out in red and gold, as were Sirius, Amy, and Cassie. Then he noticed a very unexpected someone, pulling up on the handle of his broom and coming to an abrupt stop. "Luna?"

"Hullo, Harry Potter." Wide silver eyes stared up at him from underneath a very familiar lion hat as Luna grinned and waved. "Lovely weather for a game, isn't it? Pity the Hufflepuffs seem to be suffering from Loser's Lurgy today. It would be more interesting if they could actually put up a fight."

Professor Sprout puffed up in indignation even as a few others snickered, but was cut off as she tried to respond by the mouth on Luna's lion hat opening and releasing a very realistic roar. Action on the pitch actually came to a halt as the sound rolled across the pitch and everyone turned to stare at a beaming Luna. Harry just shook his head; some things never changed. Giving her a wave, he turned and dove away, returning to the hunt for the snitch.

After a second, the others followed his lead and commentary resumed as well. "With the way the Gryffindors are starting to pull away, I have to agree. Heh. Loser's Lurgy. You're a funny girl. Can't wait to see you at Hogwarts next year."

"JORDAN!"

"What? It is. And it's seventy to thirty... err, make that eighty to thirty as Johnson puts another one through the rings. I hear the chasers and Harry Potter have a bet going... whoever scores more points before the end of the game wins. Harry, might want to find that snitch soon. I hear there's a girls' uniform in your future if they win and trust me, you don't have the legs for it."

Harry snorted; he'd be a bit worried if he did have the legs to pull the look off, honestly. But Jordan did have a good point and so he sped up his laps around the pitch, eyes flicking back and forth quickly as he sought any glimpse of gold that could prove to be the snitch. Then... there!

Leaning down, Harry took off like a shot in pursuit of the snitch. Almost as if it knew it had been spotted, it made a few uncertain moves before taking off straight up into the air. Tracking it, Harry waited until he was almost directly beneath it before yanking his broom handle up and shooting skyward in pursuit. Down below, he could see Diggory climbing in vain, hoping to catch up on an inferior broom but slowly falling back as Harry closed in on the snitch.

The distance closed slowly and Harry stretched out his arm, fingers extended to the max as he sought to curl them around his quarry. Almost... almost... metal brushed against his fingertips and Harry pushed against the broom, launching himself upward as he wrapped his fingers around the snitch. Got it!

Except he didn't have his broom anymore. Harry's eyes widened as his Nimbus fell away beneath him, watching the brown wood tumble earthward for a moment before gravity grabbed him as well and he followed suit. "Bollocks."

"Oh no! Potter is off his broom at Merlin only knows what height. I think he got the snitch before dropping but we won't know that until he comes down... after we pry it out of his fingers." Harry glared over at Jordan; oh ye of little fail. Reaching into his robes, Harry drew his wand with a flourish. Hopefully this wouldn't draw him a foul but considering the game ended with the catching of the snitch, it technically wasn't illegal. Something for the DMGS to argue about when he touched down, maybe.

Shifting Rensaren from a wand to an axe cost him precious seconds but he wasn't sure if all of its properties applied in both forms and he wasn't willing to experiment now. Harry spread his arms wide and willed himself to slow, feeling it take effect as his robes began to flap less frantically. Would he be able to do enough before he hit the ground? Merlin he hoped so...

Harry growled as the earth continued to rush up at him. He really needed to practice flying with the axe more, starting as soon as humanly possible, because he absolutely sucked at it. Fine. If his choices were reveal another ability in front of a crowd or splatter his brains across the pitch... thrusting his axe skyward, Harry willed himself into energy and disappeared in a burst of bright lightning that rocketed up into the clouds. A return bolt came a moment later, striking the center ring behind Hermione and skittering down the gold pole before slamming into the sand at the base of the rings. It left behind Harry, standing on a sheet of glass and breathing hard but otherwise alright.

There was a moment of stunned silence, then Jordan's voice returned. "My God..."

"Actually, I think Daphne Greengrass staked her claim on him first. So really, her god." Dropping to his knees as Hooch rushed over to him, Harry threw back his head and laughed at Luna's commentary. Leaning on Rensaren, Harry held out the snitch for Hooch's inspection, who nodded decisively before taking it and blowing sharply on her whistle. "Oh look, Harry won. Go Harry!"

Raising his other hand, Harry waved to the cheering crowd as he pushed himself to his feet. Idly, he wondered what the score was.

The girls had racked up ninety points when last he checked in... surely they hadn't scored seven goals during his pursuit of the snitch, right? He couldn't have lost their bet. "And the final score is two hundred and forty to thirty as Potter nabs the snitch for a hundred and fifty points and victory over the Gryffindor chasers in their side bet. Hopefully Harry's nicer to you than you would have been to him, ladies. And that's all for today. I'm Lee Jordan and I'll see you all back here on June 6 for Gryffindor versus Ravenclaw."

"Harry, m'boy! Impressive game." Ludo Bagman shook Harry's hand enthusiastically before turning to Hermione and doing the same. "Not quite the level of viciousness we heard about from the two of you tactics-wise, but it was still interesting to see that fascinating equipment of yours. Muggle sports gear, is it?"

Harry nodded, passing his helmet to Bagman for inspection. "Yes, sir. And it's hard to play like that against the Hufflepuffs or Ravenclaws. They play too fair. With the Slytherins, though... well, even after the game ended, they tried to put Hermione in the hospital wing just to prove a point. We don't really feel bad about knocking them around. If you want, though, we could put our memories in a pensieve for you and the others to watch?"

After exchanging looks with the half-dozen men he'd come to Hogwarts with and receiving nods all around, Bagman nodded at Harry and passed the red and gold helmet back. "Very good. Well, I remember how we liked to party after games back when I played for the Wasps. I'll leave you kids to it."

"Awful nice of him, considering the others ditched us half an hour ago to head up to the tower and start celebrating." Hermione glared at Bagman's retreating back as she swung her bulging bag of gear up over one shoulder. "C'mon. I'm so hungry I could eat a hippogriff."

"Think the hippogriff would have a problem with that idea." Harry dodged Hermione's fist as they exited the changing room, surprised to find the pitch almost totally abandoned. He'd spoken with his parents, sisters, and Sirius and his family right after the game, so Harry hadn't expected them to stick around while he showered,

changed, and dealt with the DMGS delegation. Still, it was a bit surprising that Daphne and Su hadn't stuck around to wait for him and Hermione. Oh well.

Crossing the grounds, Harry and Hermione made their way back into the school and slowly ascended the seven flights of stairs up to Gryffindor Tower. The Fat Lady, already half-drunk from her celebration with Violet and a number of other women from nearby pictures, hiccupped and swung open at the sight of them. Beyond, Harry could hear a party in full swing and he steeled himself as he bent down and passed through the portrait hole.

Harry's eyes took a moment to adjust to the light of the common room. The room's windows were small and recessed, not providing sufficient light for the room even on the brightest of days and the students had neglected to light all the candles and torches for the afternoon, leaving the room steeped in shadows for their celebration. Not that he was going to say anything about it; he and Ginny had taken advantage of shadowy corners more than once after a particularly good game.

Trying to get his focus off of his ex-fiancé before he wandered too far down a road he didn't wish to travel, Harry looked around the room until his eyes landed on a head of pale blonde hair and his brow furrowed. Was that... "Luna?"

"Hullo, Harry. I like your common room, although I'm surprised Daphne hasn't tried to redecorate it yet. Isn't this a bit too much of one color for her?" Harry blinked; was that a joke or was Luna Lovegood of all people being catty? Daphne seemed to think it was the latter, glaring at her fellow blonde from across the couch. Luna ignored it, patting a spot on the couch between herself and Daphne. "Come. Sit, sit. That was a marvelously exciting game today."

Harry cautiously took a seat between Daphne and Luna. It was for the greater good, he reckoned: at least with him as a buffer zone, there was a lesser chance of the two of them fighting. Su was perched on the arm of a nearby chair, leaving the seat itself for Hermione. Looking over at Luna, he realized she was wearing

something utterly familiar and yet... not. "Luna? Where did you get your hands on a Hogwarts uniform?"

Giggling, Luna reached down and tugged on the bottom of her black vest. "Same place as everyone else, Harry. Madam Malkin's." The others had a laugh at his expense as Harry rolled his eyes and leaned back. Yeah, he'd walked into that one pretty well. Given she was a pureblood and practically guaranteed to be coming to Hogwarts in the fall, he supposed it made sense for her to have shopped already. After all, certain stores that depended on student traffic to drive their sales would be desperate for business and she probably would have found some excellent sales.

The uniform wasn't quite right, though, much like anything else Luna wore. The crisp white short-sleeved blouse, black vest with the Hogwarts crest (which would be replaced by a house patch after sorting), and knee-length black skirt were all perfectly normal, but instead of either the black tie of an unsorted student or a house color tie, hers was rainbow striped. It matched the rainbow striped knee-high toe socks she was wearing, adding a splash of color to the otherwise drab black and white uniform. Her butterbeer cork necklace rested against her collarbone atop the vest and Harry realized with a flash of guilt that he hadn't worn his since returning from Daphne's house. "So, what do you think of my outfit, Harry? Next year is going to be ever so fun..."

This fell into the same category as 'does this outfit make me look fat', Harry knew, and he was loathe to stick his foot in his mouth. After struggling for a moment to come up with an appropriate answer, he settled upon something that he thought she'd accept. "It's... unique."

That summed up Luna herself pretty well too, come to think of it.

Joe's Note: This was just a silly little idea to get you all introduced to the girls who will be featuring as part of what I call the 'minus one' year; the year in which Ginny and Luna are canonically, starting one year after Harry. So we get to spend a little time here with Jasmine, Rose, Luna, and Lara. Also, I realized we're missing birthdays for most of the group and that none save Harry's have been celebrated even though most of the characters have had a birthday so far over the course of the story's year. Just for future reference (mine and yours), here's where they line up on the calendar so you know when their birthday will pop up in the Year 2 cycle:

Luna: March 15th

Su: May 5th

Jasmine: June 6th

Rose: June 7th

Harry: July 31st

Daphne: August 15th

Hermione: September 19th

Lara: November 30th

Hermione and Lara have the similar problem of needing to be eleven by September 1st affecting their age. Since they both would have turned eleven too late to join others in their birth year, Hermione has to sit for nearly a calendar year before being old enough to attend Hogwarts and is eleven for a mere nineteen days in her first year before turning twelve. Likewise Lara would be the first or one of the first to turn twelve in her year, four months before Luna turns twelve.

Sipping from a cup of tea, Lily Potter née Evans sat and watched the softly crackling fire in the stone fireplace, wondering when her life had been reduced to this. Twelve years ago, she'd had plans to go somewhere... be someone. Then she'd forgotten to take her potion on the wrong night and... well, she wouldn't trade Harry, Jasmine, or Rose for anything in the world, but it had put a bit of a crimp on things. Especially when her friendship with Alice Longbottom dissolved; the two had been planning to put Harry and Neville into her mother-in-law Augusta's care since the wizarding world had evidently yet to evolve to the point of having daycare centers, allowing them both to have careers. Then Voldemort had struck, Alice had become a snob with no time for Lily, and a second pregnancy had sealed her fate.

Hmmph. Lily shook her head at the absurdity of the thought. She was acting like she was old and decrepit, rather than a young mother of three. In four months, all of them would be on the train to Hogwarts and she could start looking for a job again. As long as it wasn't something as time-intensive as being an auror, she'd likely have holidays off to spend with her children and during the summer... well, they were growing up fast. Harry in particular. She could trust him if not the twins to make sure the house didn't burn down while she was at work each day.

Harry. He was the reason she was sitting here, about to welcome strangers into her home. There was something just plain off about that boy as of late, Lily mused. He was helpful... he was thoughtful... big brothers were supposed to torment their little sisters, not arrange play dates for them. It just wasn't natural.

Speaking of the impending play date and her strange visitors, at least one of them would be familiar to her. Harry had suggested inviting Cassie Black over to help her make friends with some of the girls she'd be attending school with, while using others as a method of forcing the twins to accept Cassie's presence. Pure brilliance, in Lily's opinion, although she was surprised he was actually sparing Cassie any thought. For the last year or two, he'd either ignored the shy witch or tormented her because of her crush on him. It was a nice change of pace, though, so Lily wasn't going to argue with it.

The other two, though... she'd met one of them a single time, while the other was a complete mystery to her. Luna Lovegood had been one of the three to send her son a marriage contract, albeit as a trap to lure him over and talk. Lily wasn't sure how she felt about the strange little blonde; the incident hadn't endeared her to Lily and their brief meeting at Harry's quidditch match hadn't improved her opinion any. But Harry seemed taken with her, or at least with her companionship, so Lily felt she should probably start learning to accept Luna's presence.

As for the other girl Harry had recommended visit... Lily had no idea who Lara Ramsay was. Lily had sent out Hedwig with an invitation after receiving Harry's letter, the reply coming on a piece of lined paper torn from a spiral-bound notebook and written with blue ink. A

muggleborn like her? A half-blood like Harry? Likely the latter, given she was coming by floo, but either way... how did Harry know her and why was she willing to drop what she was doing to come play with his sisters?

Too many questions, far too little time.

The fire flared the beautiful green color characteristic of floo travel and Lily set her cup down as she rose to greet the new arrival. She let out a breath she hadn't even been aware she'd been holding when she took in the ducked head crowned with long, straight brown hair. Cassie. The girl she regarded as her third daughter straightened up, curtsying as she smiled shyly. "Good afternoon, Aunt Lily."

"Cassie. Thank God." Lily hustled over, waving her wand over the girl's black dress to remove the fine layer of soot and ash that she'd acquired in travel. "I know Amy drags... err, I know your mother has you come with her most of the time when she has tea with her friends. Do you know who Lara Ramsay is?"

Cassie shook her head, very carefully seating herself at the table and folding her hands in her lap. "Mother hasn't taken me to a tea party in... almost a year, I think. She says it's for my own good, because she doesn't want me to make friends with girls who will just turn on me when I grow into my powers."

Sighing, Lily turned away to keep her disgust from showing on her face. While she wouldn't tell the Blacks how to raise their child, Lily really didn't know how to feel about Amy projecting her own neuroses onto Cassie. After all, how many friends could a girl possibly make if she was constantly being told that making friends was a waste of time and they'd all betray her in the end? After all, Amy herself had friends these days, so it wasn't impossible for a Veela to have a healthy and normal social life. Lily made up her mind then and there that if today was a success, she'd host daily play dates for an army of strangers if it meant poor Cassie went to Hogwarts with at least one friend.

"Well, I'm sure that..." Lily trailed off as the fire flared again, this time disgorging a black-haired girl who stumbled upon arrival, dropping to her knees and squealing as she skidded across the floor. She came

to a halt at Lily's feet, rolling onto her back and blowing her hair out of her eyes. Green eyes, more olive than the emerald that Lily herself possessed, stared up as the girl smiled and giggled. It was infectious, Lily soon discovered, and she found herself laughing as she offered the poor girl a hand. "Don't use the floo much, I take it?"

Letting Lily hoist her to her feet, Lara looked around curiously as she tucked a shockingly white lock of hair behind her ear. "Nae, ah use the floo a'plenty. It jes hates meh e'ery time." Turning her attention from her surroundings to the people in the room with her, she eyed Cassie for a moment before moving on to Lily. "Ye must be Mrs. Potter. Thanks for invitin' meh."

Good Lord. And she'd thought the worst time she'd have of deciphering a Scottish accent was that time she'd listened to Professor McGonagall tear into the Marauders for a particularly bad prank in seventh year. Lily gestured to the table and waited until Lara had seated herself beside Cassie before removing the stasis charm protecting the biscuits she'd laid out, another flick of her wand quickly bringing a pot of water to boil so they too could have tea. "Please, call me Lily. Or if you end up visiting a lot, Aunt Lily. Mrs. Potter was my husband's thoroughly unpleasant mother, God rest her soul."

"Oi. Okay, erm, Lily. Nice to meet ye." Lara looked over at the floo for a moment before shaking her head and sighing. "Ah wonder how lang Luna's gon to pester mah mum about the new wireless telephone we jes bought. Tis rilly nae tha interestin'."

As she served tea to the two girls, preparing a third cup as well for the yet to arrive Luna, Lily looked Lara over. Denim had yet to make its way into the wizarding world and so Lara's jean skirt stood out compared to Cassie's frilly black dress and Lily's own robes. The rest of her was a rather beguiling mix of wizard and muggle as well: she wore glasses with thick purple plastic frames and a rosary made of glossy black beads rested atop a three-quarters sleeve jersey shirt that was purple with gold sleeves, the colors of the Pride of Portree. Flying back and forth across Lara's chest was line art of three figures on brooms and every so often, the three would slam into each other before the lines wriggled and reshaped into the words 'Chasers do it better as a group'. Cute. Lily cast about for something to start a

conversation with. "So you have a telephone? Half-blood, I'm guessing, since you like quidditch and have charmed clothes?"

Lara nodded, nibbling on a biscuit as she kept staring over at the fireplace. "Mum's a witch; she's writing a book she's hopin Hogwarts wull use fur Muggle Studies in a year or two. Mah pa's a muggle wha works at BBC Scotland. He's yin of the writers for An Là's sports bits. Dad wusn't kin on meh skippin a day of school to come oover, but mum convinced him it didnae rilly matter since ah wasnae goin to gae any firther than primary so mah grades dunnae rilly matter."

"Much as I hate to admit it, she does have a point. Although if I'd known you had school, I would have offered to have you over this weekend instead. Oh well." Lily joined Lara in watching the floo, wondering where the last member of the group was. "So, how do you know Luna?"

"Her mum and mah mum went to Hogwarts together, but it's oor dads wha get along best. Luna's dad ains The Quibbler and mine works fur the Beeb, sae they luff tae blether aboot their work. Ah'm the only wan whu'll put up with her insanity an she's the only witch ah ken wha can understand meh, sae wa're stooch wit aich other. Wasae soor aboot this, but she told meh tah come an sae hier ah am." Sighing, Lara rose and smoothed her skirt down as she stomped over to the fireplace. "Oi, fur the luff o God. Braw then, al'll gae throo an fetch her afore mum ends up silencin her an tossin her throo the lum agin." Grabbing a handful of floo powder from the pot atop the mantle, she hurled it into the orange flames. "The... oomph!"

A colorful missile erupted from the roaring green flames, plowing into Lara and sending the pair of them sprawling back onto the floor. Lily snorted in laughter and then gaped at the stream of obscenities that began to emerge from Lara's mouth. After so many years among the more uptight wizarding world, she'd become unused to such casual profanity and felt herself blushing as Lara continued to express her displeasure with being mowed down by the new arrival. And... was that even anatomically possible?

After a few moments of struggling, the two girls got themselves sorted out and Lara hopped to her feet again, yanking Luna upright beside

her. "Really, Lara, what would your mum say if she heard you saying things like that?"

"Shedae mutter aboot whither or nae lettin meh lairn tae cook from Uncle Gordon wis worth the crabbits that rubbed aff, an then tell meh tae gae cook neeps an tatties?"

"True, true." The two girls chuckled before turning to Lily, and the older woman let out a disbelieving chuckle. Luna looked like... well, a crazier version of her. Well, a crazier and younger version. Some time between their time together in the stands at the Gryffindor versus Hufflepuff game and today, Luna had acquired hair the same shade of red as her own. Thankfully that was the extent of the change; she still had the same slightly vacant-looking silver eyes and the necklace made of butterbeer corks Lily had seen her wear to the game. Her attire didn't make her any more normal-looking: a simple summer dress with a pair of trousers under it, both made of a fabric that displayed a constantly swirling mix of bright colors. It was enough to make one vomit... and Lily wondered why she'd never seen Dumbledore wearing something made of it. "Hullo, Mrs. Potter. Did you know you look just like me? Except a bit older and less fashionable? Don't worry, we can have you fixed up in a jiffy. Well, except for the old part. Mum's still trying to track down the Fountain of Youth so my dad can write about it for The Quibbler..."

Letting her hand drift down, Lily brushed her fingers over her wand. Must... not... silence... obnoxious... child...

Taking to the air, Jasmine circled the pitch a few times before descending to hover beside the mysterious girl who'd shown up at her house for this little play date her mother and brother had arranged. When she and Rose had come downstairs, it'd been to find Luna humming quietly to herself as she served herself tea, Lara snickering, Cassie sitting so still the twins had initially thought her petrified, and their mother glaring at Luna so intensely that if looks could kill, the young redhead would be six feet under. "So what did you do to piss my mother off like that?"

Luna shrugged and smiled innocently as she tinkered with some knobs near the head of her broom. It was supposedly a homemade broomstick her mother had come up with and Jasmine was willing to believe her. After all, who would pay money for something this odd? It looked utterly bizarre, the shaft crooked and twisting, terminating in an utterly disorganized mass of bristles that were... belching blue smoke? "I just told her that she looked like me. Except older and less fashionable. The first one is definitely true; she's the same age as my mum and my mum is older than me. And the second is true too. After all, I've been informed that wearing all one color is quite unfashionable."

"And wearing every color known to wizardkind all at once is any better?" Jasmine was hoping she didn't come off as mean; she was merely curious as to how Luna's mind worked. After all, she couldn't afford to alienate her fellow redhead: out of the other four girls currently on the property, Luna was the only one willing to mount a broom and play catch with her out on the quidditch pitch. "Not to mention this whole dress and trousers thing you have going..."

Rolling her broom so she hung upside-down beside Jasmine, Luna looked down at her hips and then over at her new friend. "Well, if I did this in just a dress, I'd be showing the world a bit more than I want to. But wearing just trousers isn't ladylike, according to... well, everyone. So why not wear both? And if all one color is unfashionable, then logically wearing all colors has to be the most fashionable option, no?"

Jasmine blinked. Luna had a point there. An odd, probably illogical despite her claims of logic, point, but a point nonetheless. "I guess that makes sense. Still, I think I'll stick to only two or three colors. Red and gold. Or maybe black, red, and gold."

"Ahh. You're hoping to be in your brother's house when you get to Hogwarts?" Luna's broom accelerated as she pulled away, still trailing a bit of blue smoke from her bristles as she rocketed away down the length of the pitch. Rising as she went, Luna shot through the center ring before diving towards the earth, winding her way around the pole before pulling up inches from the ground and racing back over to Jasmine. Pulling up beside the gobsmacked Jasmine,

she grinned. "Or is it another Gryffindor quidditch player you're hoping to spend six years with?"

"Bloody hell, can you teach me how to fly like that? Hermione would definitely notice me if..." Jasmine realized what she'd just admitted to and abruptly closed her mouth, blushing fiercely. Except Luna had already made a reference to that herself. Sweet Merlin, was there anybody who wasn't aware of her crush? "Am I that obvious?"

Luna's silver eyes bored into hers and Jasmine shivered; it was like the other girl was staring straight into her soul. "Well, a piece of advice? If you don't want it to be known, you should learn to deny it when someone else brings it up. And perhaps not admit it yourself." Floating over to the crate that held the pitch's set of balls, Luna tilted to one side and grabbed the quaffle. "That, and Harry and Daphne were talking about it when they thought I was asleep. Although in his defense, I am a very good faker."

Oh. Great. So wait a minute, if Harry had been discussing it with his friends, did that mean he'd talked to Hermione about her? Then again, it wasn't like Hermione didn't know. After that whole embarrassing kiss situation back in January, there was no chance she didn't. Still, she'd have to punch her brother when he got home from school. Even if Hermione knew, that didn't mean the rest of the world needed to know too. "So can you help me learn how to fly like you? My dad flies really well, but he's really busy these days and my mom flies about as well as a brick. Actually, a brick flies in a straight line if you throw it..."

"I guess. Never played quidditch before, though, so I don't know how much help I'm going to be there." Luna looked down at the red quaffle in her hand, brow furrowing, before hurling it at Jasmine. "Although if all it takes is throwing a ball through some rings... how hard can it be?"

Jasmine caught the ball, clenching her thighs tighter around her broomstick as she wobbled a bit. "Well, there is the fact you're moving and throwing, plus the wind. And three other chasers, a keeper, and two bludgers. It's harder than it looks." Whipping through a quick turn, Jasmine scowled as her long red hair whipped around

her head, tugging at her scalp and then slapping at her face. "Gahh! How do girls play like this?"

Chuckling, Luna raced past, keeping one hand on the handle of her broom as she rolled upside down and batted the ball out of Jasmine's hands, taking advantage of her distraction. "I believe it's called a braid." To quote her mother, 'Thank you, Obvious Girl'. Luna dove and caught the ball, floating back up to Jasmine's level and spinning it as she balanced it atop the tip of her index finger. "Or we could cut it."

"That..." Jasmine reached up, fingering the long red locks she'd been growing out for as long as she could remember. Just like her sister. Rose. Hmm. They'd probably be going into the same house when they got to Hogwarts, since they were so similar. Did she really want to have an identical twin who was so identical that people would mix them up, like those awful Weasley twins she'd met when the family took Harry to King's Cross in September? So if it helped people tell her and Rose apart and helped her on the pitch... how could she possibly lose? "...sounds like a great idea! Hmm. Do you know what Gwenog Jones looks like?" Luna nodded. "How do you think I'd look with her haircut? Except in red, obviously?"

Luna drifted closer, tossing the quaffle to Jasmine. Jasmine grunted as it smacked into her chest but caught it before it fell to earth, throwing it back to Luna and pouting when the other girl caught it easily with one hand, pulling it in to tuck it against her body. No fair. The girl who didn't seem to have any real interest in it had better skills than she did? "Could work. Come on, let's get inside and try it, then come back out and play once you have more suitable hair. What's the worst that can happen?"

Wincing, Jasmine followed Luna as her fellow redhead descended to the ground. Famous last words, those were.

"Sae Cassie, yeh're yin o they... Vela thangs?"

"Veela. And I'm only half. My mother's a Veela and my father is a wizard. It makes me a half-breed, rather like how you're a half-blood."

"Heh. Sae hoo laing oontil this aura thing o yers is supposed tae kick in? Cause we've been sittin here talkin fur alf an hour, an lah still dinna think yeh're pritty." Lara paused and pondered her words for a moment before grimacing. "Och, yeh're pritty an all but nae in that 'trip o'er maself an dae stoopid things' way yeh mentioned."

That made Rose chuckle as she looked up from the bottle of blood red muggle nail polish Lara had brought with her. She had to admit, the stuff smelled truly foul and took time to dry but really, how easy could it be to point a wand accurately at one's own fingertips? Especially when it came time to color the nails on her dominant hand? Even if she was a Potter, there were some muggle conveniences that she was definitely going to stick to no matter what her pureblood peers at Hogwarts said. Besides, going through all the different colors Lara owned to help each other pick out the perfect color had been fun. "Lara, you do realize you're a girl, right? And that Cassie's a girl?" Lara nodded. "The aura is a mating thing. Why would you be affected? At any rate, she's too young. It probably won't even show up until next summer or so."

Lara scowled and crossed her arms over her chest defensively. "Och ah dinna ken. She was all goin on aboot lasses endin up hatin her cause o it. Ah kent maybe yeh lot were ooptight aboot tha sort o thin an sae the aura wid make lasses fin her pritty in the wrong sort o way, then hate her fur makin them feel tha... stop laughin! It made sense in meh head!"

"I'm sorry, I shouldn't laugh. After all, we know more about magic but if we ever visit the muggle world, you'll have one up on us." Although with how obsessed Lara was with the Pride of Portree, she obviously had some exposure to the wizarding world. Just the same priorities as Jasmine, Rose assumed: sports, sports, and sports. "But no, most witches generally end up disliking Veela because they get jealous. Even my dad can't help himself around Cassie's mum, and he's had how many years to get used to her?" Rose looked over at Cassie, studying the quiet brunette intently, before fixing Lara with a speculative look. She had a rather tenuous truce with the former at the moment, while the latter was a relative stranger. Did she really want to reveal something this personal about herself? Then again,

with how bloody obvious Jasmine had been as of late... how long would it be before everyone started assuming? Guilt by association, as it were? "I've been reading as much about Veela as I can. So far, no book has been able to tell me whether or not Jasmine and I will be affected by your aura."

That one grabbed Cassie's attention; she'd been able to talk and continue spreading black paint on her nails when Lara asked her simple questions, but this evidently warranted the brunette's full attention. Cassie's eyes flickered: confusion, understanding, doubt, hesitation, and then finally determination. "Not to be rude, but are you... erm... that is to say, like your sister?"

Rose arched a brow; little Miss Pureblood couldn't even say it? She knew Uncle Sirius was rather old-fashioned and that Cassie led a sheltered life, but this was a little ridiculous. "We're identical twins, Cassie. Is it really surprising that we're completely identical?"

"Like her sister how?" Lara looked back and forth between the two girls, looking more than a little lost. Then voices in the hall distracted her and all three turned to look as Luna led... "Heh. Ah guess yeh're nae completely identical onymore."

Launching herself to her feet, Rose dashed out of her room and down the hall in pursuit of Luna and Jasmine. "Hey!" The redheads looked back at her, Jasmine's eyes widening as she tugged at Luna's hand, trying to get away. "Oh no you don't!" Rose wrapped her hand around Jasmine's other wrist and Luna surrendered her grip, allowing Rose to pull her sister into Harry's room, closing the door behind them. "What the bloody hell did you do to yourself? Mum's going to be furious!"

Jasmine sniffed, tossing her head and making it very obvious that something had changed. After all, when Rose made that same move, a curtain of red hair shifted behind her. Now, Jasmine had short red locks that barely even reached her chin. "I just wanted to try a new look before we started school this fall. Don't worry, it's not your fault I'm maturing faster. After all, I am the older twin."

"By ten minutes." Nine minutes before midnight on June 6th for one of them, one minute after midnight for the other, and Jasmine treated it like a multi-year gap. Rose rolled her eyes. "And is it school, or someone at school that you want to look different for?"

Yanking her arm out of Rose's grip, Jasmine huffed and stomped out the door. "If you don't know what you're talking about, don't open your mouth, Rose. You'll just embarrass yourself. If it's that important to you, my hair was giving me problems when I flew. That's why I cut it. Nothing more, nothing less."

Rose snorted. She'd watched her sister plant one on Hermione in the kitchen, not to mention Jasmine ignoring their own brother to cheer for the muggleborn keeper at the last quidditch game. So even if it wasn't directly Hermione-related, it was by association: Jasmine wanted it for quidditch, which she only was interested in playing as a way of attracting Hermione's attention. Same difference.

Shaking her head in disgust, Rose turned and walked back to her room. Her initial spike of dismay at her sister's radical attempt to differentiate them was rapidly fading, being replaced by annoyance. Maybe the haircut was for the best. If her sister was going to be so incredibly crass in her pursuit of someone, Rose really didn't want to be associated with her when they got to Hogwarts. Honestly. Wasn't that why they'd spent the last year or two alternating between ignoring and ridiculing Cassie? Her awkward, obvious, and unwanted crush on their brother?

Bleh. Who cared if they'd done everything together for the last ten years? She could make her own friends for once! Besides, people would undoubtedly find her the lesser of the twins if she tried to hang out with the same people as Jasmine. She was the quiet, bookish one who only had a minimal interest in a sport that involved watching people try to kill each other while throwing balls through hoops. Merlin forbid.

When she entered her room, Cassie and Lara were still scrambling to return to their spots on the floor and Rose sighed. "You heard that, didn't you?" They both nodded. "Fabulous. Lara, my sister likes girls. Or rather girl, which is causing a bit of a problem at the moment. I like

girls too. That's why Cassie's aura might affect me even if it doesn't affect you. But I don't know if it even works against girls like me, and there's the fact we grew up together. Jasmine and I might be immune like if Cassie was our sister or cousin or something."

"Oh. Hmm. Well, as lang as yeh dinna crush on meh, ah dinna see a problem." Lara blew on her nails, every other one painted a purple to match her shirt and glasses. Sitting in front of her was a bottle of gold nail polish, ready to fill in the gaps. Wow. Someone was taking their Pride of Portree obsession a little bit too far. After all, she and Jasmine supported the Holyhead Harpies but they didn't walk around with green everything. "Sae, wha's this lass yer sister likes an whit's the problem wi' her?"

Rose crawled over to her nightstand and retrieved the letter she'd received from Harry, begging her to tolerate Cassie's presence and go along with the afternoon he and their mother had arranged. Opening the envelope, she pulled out a wizard photograph and handed it to Lara. "The girl with brown hair punching the boy is Hermione. The boy is my brother Harry, the one Luna tried to marry. The problem is that they're best friends. Crushing on your brother's friend can't end well. And I'm not even sure Hermione likes other girls, which means Jasmine's just making herself look stupid. And since before today, most people couldn't tell us apart, making me look stupid too."

Nodding, Lara grinned as she peeked up over the top of the photo. "Yeh ken, yer brither's kind o' cute. As lang as we dinna end up best friends, is nae weird, right?"

"No, but..." At Lara's side, Cassie let out what sounded suspiciously like a growl and clenched her fist, opening it to reveal a small ball of fire. The action startled the half-blood Scot so badly she kicked over a bottle of nail polish as she scooted away frantically. Rose cringed before realizing it was closed and she wouldn't need her mother to come clean a mess off the carpet. Lara continued to edge away across the floor and Rose chuckled. "...I hope you're kidding. Because there'd be other things standing in your way."

"Eep."

CHAPTER 18